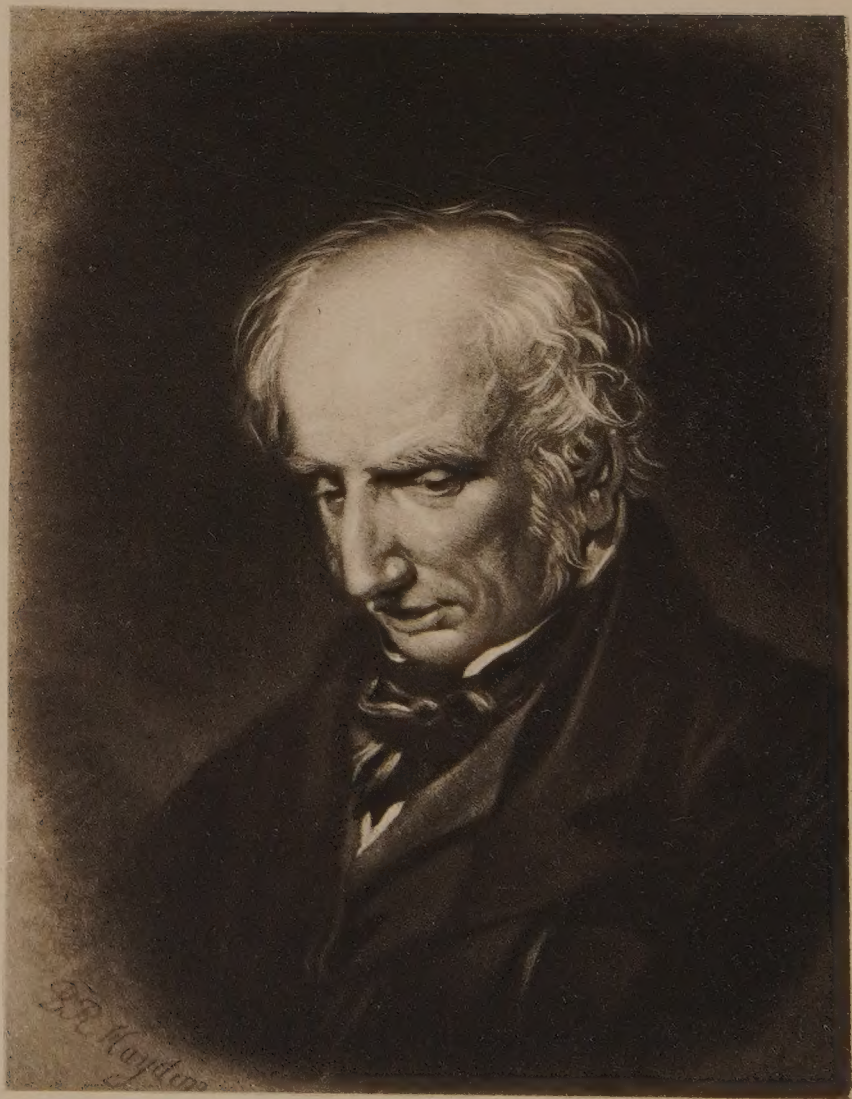




Rydal Edition
THE COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS
OF
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH
IN TEN VOLUMES
VOLUME I



821
W89

THE COMPLETE POETICAL
WORKS OF
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

I
EARLY POEMS



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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The text of this Rydal Edition of Wordsworth's Poems is that of the Cambridge Edition of the poet's works, edited by Andrew J. George, and embodying Wordsworth's latest revisions. The dates at the head of each poem are those of composition and first publication. Volume X contains the Essays and Prefaces on Poetry which Wordsworth printed in various editions of his Poems, and also the author's complete Notes. The headnotes, known as the I. F. Notes, dictated by the poet himself late in life to Miss Fenwick, form an important feature of this edition, as of the Cambridge Edition. They reveal the times, places, occasions, and circumstances in which the poems had their origins. The frontispieces, with the exception of the portrait, are from photographs taken by Walmsley Brothers of Ambleside, England.

CONTENTS

LINES WRITTEN AS A SCHOOL EXERCISE AT HAWKS- HEAD, ANNO ÆTATIS 14	3
EXTRACT FROM THE CONCLUSION OF A POEM, COM- POSED IN ANTICIPATION OF LEAVING SCHOOL .	8
WRITTEN IN VERY EARLY YOUTH	10
AN EVENING WALK. ADDRESSED TO A YOUNG LADY	11
LINES WRITTEN WHILE SAILING IN A BOAT AT EVENING	28
REMEMBRANCE OF COLLINS, COMPOSED UPON THE THAMES NEAR RICHMOND	30
DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES TAKEN DURING A PEDESTRIAN TOUR AMONG THE ALPS	32
GUILT AND SORROW; OR, INCIDENTS UPON SALIS- BURY PLAIN	61

CONTENTS

LINES LEFT UPON A SEAT IN A YEW-TREE, WHICH STANDS NEAR THE LAKE OF ESTHWAITE, ON A DESOLATE PART OF THE SHORE, COMMANDING A BEAUTIFUL PROSPECT	96
THE BORDERERS. A TRAGEDY	100
THE REVERIE OF POOR SUSAN	218
THE BIRTH OF LOVE, TRANSLATED FROM SOME FRENCH STANZAS BY FRANCIS WRANGHAM	219

POEMS

1785-1797

IF thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven,
Then, to the measure of that heaven-born light,
Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content: —
The stars pre-eminent in magnitude,
And they that from the zenith dart their beams,
(Visible though they be to half the earth,
Though half a sphere be conscious of their brightness)
Are yet of no diviner origin,
No purer essence, than the one that burns,
Like an untended watch-fire on the ridge
Of some dark mountain; or than those which seem
Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
Among the branches of the leafless trees.
All are the undying offspring of one Sire:
Then, to the measure of the light vouchsafed,
Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content.

WORDSWORTH'S POETICAL WORKS

LINES

WRITTEN AS A SCHOOL EXERCISE AT HAWKSHEAD,
ANNO ÆTATIS 14

1785 1850

“AND has the Sun his flaming chariot driven
Two hundred times around the ring of heaven,
Since Science first, with all her sacred train,
Beneath yon roof began her heavenly reign?
While thus I mused, methought, before mine eyes,
The Power of EDUCATION seemed to rise;
Not she whose rigid precepts trained the boy
Dead to the sense of every finer joy;
Nor that vile wretch who bade the tender age
Spurn Reason's law and humour Passion's rage;
But she who trains the generous British youth
In the bright paths of fair majestic Truth:
Emerging slow from Academus' grove
In heavenly majesty she seemed to move.
Stern was her forehead, but a smile serene
Softened the terrors of her awful mien.’

LINES

Close at her side were all the powers, designed
To curb, exalt, reform the tender mind:
With panting breast, now pale as winter snows,
Now flushed as Hebe, Emulation rose;
Shame followed after with reverted eye,
And hue far deeper than the Tyrian dye;
Last Industry appeared with steady pace,
A smile sat beaming on her pensive face.
I gazed upon the visionary train,
Threw back my eyes, returned, and gazed again.
When lo! the heavenly goddess thus began,
Through all my frame the pleasing accents ran.

“When Superstition left the golden light
And fled indignant to the shades of night;
When pure Religion reared the peaceful breast
And lulled the warring passions into rest,
Drove far away the savage thoughts that roll
In the dark mansions of the bigot’s soul,
Enlivening Hope displayed her cheerful ray,
And beamed on Britain’s sons a brighter day;
So when on Ocean’s face the storm subsides,
Hushed are the winds and silent are the tides;
The God of day, in all the pomp of light,
Moves through the vault of heaven, and dissipates
the night;

LINES

Wide o'er the main a trembling lustre plays,
The glittering waves reflect the dazzling blaze.
Science with joy saw Superstition fly
Before the lustre of Religion's eye;
With rapture she beheld Britannia smile,
Clapped her strong wings, and sought the cheerful isle,
The shades of night no more the soul involve,
She sheds her beam, and, lo! the shades dissolve;
No jarring monks, to gloomy cell confined,
With mazy rules perplex the weary mind;
No shadowy forms entice the soul aside,
Secure she walks, Philosophy her guide.
Britain, who long her warriors had adored,
And deemed all merit centred in the sword;
Britain, who thought to stain the field was fame,
Now honoured Edward's less than Bacon's name.
Her sons no more in listed fields advance
To ride the ring, or toss the beamy lance;
No longer steel their indurated hearts
To the mild influence of the finer arts;
Quick to the secret grotto they retire
To court majestic Truth, or wake the golden lyre;
By generous Emulation taught to rise,
The seats of learning brave the distant skies.
Then noble Sandys, inspired with great design,
Reared Hawkshead's happy roof, and called it mine.

LINES

There have I loved to show the tender age
The golden precepts of the classic page;
To lead the mind to those Elysian plains
Where, throned in gold, immortal Science reigns;
Fair to the view is sacred Truth displayed,
In all the majesty of light arrayed,
To teach, on rapid wings, the curious soul
To roam from heaven to heaven, from pole to pole,
From thence to search the mystic cause of things
And follow Nature to her secret springs;
Nor less to guide the fluctuating youth
Firm in the sacred paths of moral truth,
To regulate the mind's disordered frame,
And quench the passions kindling into flame;
The glimmering fires of Virtue to enlarge,
And purge from Vice's dross my tender charge.
Oft have I said, the paths of Fame pursue,
And all that Virtue dictates, dare to do;
Go to the world, peruse the book of man,
And learn from thence thy own defects to scan;
Severely honest, break no plighted trust,
But coldly rest not here — be more than just;
Join to the rigours of the sires of Rome
The gentler manners of the private dome;
When Virtue weeps in agony of woe,
Teach from the heart the tender tear to flow;

LINES

If Pleasure's soothing song thy soul entice,
Or all the gaudy pomp of splendid Vice,
Arise superior to the Siren's power,
The wretch, the short-lived vision of an hour;
Soon fades her cheek, her blushing beauties fly,
As fades the chequered bow that paints the sky.

“So shall thy sire, whilst hope his breast inspires,
And wakes anew life's glimmering trembling fires,
Hear Britain's sons rehearse thy praise with joy,
Look up to heaven, and bless his darling boy.
If e'er these precepts quelled the passions' strife,
If e'er they smoothed the rugged walks of life,
If e'er they pointed forth the blissful way
That guides the spirit to eternal day,
Do thou, if gratitude inspire thy breast,
Spurn the soft fetters of lethargic rest.
Awake, awake! and snatch the slumbering lyre,
Let this bright morn and Sandys the song inspire.”

“I looked obedience: the celestial Fair
Smiled like the morn, and vanished into air.”

EXTRACT

FROM THE CONCLUSION OF A POEM, COMPOSED IN
ANTICIPATION OF LEAVING SCHOOL

1786 1815

Written at Hawkshead. The beautiful image with which this poem concludes, suggested itself to me while I was resting in a boat along with my companions under the shade of a magnificent row of sycamores, which then extended their branches from the shore of the promontory upon which stands the ancient, and at that time the more picturesque, Hall of Coniston, the seat of the Le Flemings from very early times. The poem of which it was the conclusion was of many hundred lines, and contained thoughts and images most of which have been dispersed through my other writings.

DEAR native regions, I foretell,
From what I feel at this farewell,
That, wheresoe'er my steps may tend,
And whensoe'er my course shall end,
If in that hour a single tie
Survive of local sympathy,
My soul will cast the backward view,
The longing look alone on you.

Thus, while the Sun sinks down to rest
Far in the regions of the west,

EXTRACT

Though to the vale no parting beam
Be given, not one memorial gleam,
A lingering light he fondly throws
On the dear hills where first he rose.

WRITTEN IN VERY EARLY YOUTH

1786 1807

CALM is all Nature as a resting wheel.
The kine are couched upon the dewy grass;
The horse alone, seen dimly as I pass,
Is cropping audibly his later meal:
Dark is the ground; a slumber seems to steal
O'er vale, and mountain, and the starless sky.
Now, in this blank of things, a harmony,
Home-felt, and home-created, comes to heal
That grief for which the senses still supply
Fresh food; for only then, when memory
Is hushed, am I at rest. My Friends! restrain
Those busy cares that would allay my pain;
Oh! leave me to myself, nor let me feel
The officious touch that makes me droop again.

AN EVENING WALK

ADDRESSED TO A YOUNG LADY

1787-9 1793

The young Lady to whom this was addressed was my Sister. It was composed at school, and during my two first College vacations. There is not an image in it which I have not observed; and now, in my seventy-third year, I recollect the time and place where most of them were noticed. I will confine myself to one instance: —

“ Waving his hat, the shepherd, from the vale,
Directs his winding dog the cliffs to scale, —
The dog, loud barking, 'mid the glittering rocks,
Hunts, where his master points, the intercepted flocks.”

I was an eye-witness of this for the first time while crossing the Pass of Dunmail Raise. Upon second thought, I will mention another image: —

“ And, fronting the bright west, yon oak entwines
Its darkening boughs and leaves, in stronger lines.”

This is feebly and imperfectly expressed, but I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. It was in the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them; and I made a resolution to supply, in some degree, the deficiency. I could not have been at that time above fourteen years of age. The description of the swans, that follows, was taken from the daily opportunities I had of

AN EVENING WALK

observing their habits, not as confined to the gentleman's park, but in a state of nature. There were two pairs of them that divided the lake of Esthwaite and its in-and-out-flowing streams between them, never trespassing a single yard upon each other's separate domain. They were of the old magnificent species, bearing in beauty and majesty about the same relation to the Thames swan which that does to the goose. It was from the remembrance of those noble creatures I took, thirty years after, the picture of the swan which I have discarded from the poem of Dion. While I was a school-boy, the late Mr. Curwen introduced a little fleet of those birds, but of the inferior species, to the lake of Windermere. Their principal home was about his own island; but they sailed about into remote parts of the lake, and, either from real or imagined injury done to the adjoining fields, they were got rid of at the request of the farmers and proprietors, but to the great regret of all who had become attached to them, from noticing their beauty and quiet habits. I will conclude my notice of this poem by observing that the plan of it has not been confined to a particular walk or an individual place, — a proof (of which I was unconscious at the time) of my unwillingness to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact and real circumstance. The country is idealised rather than described in any one of its local aspects.

General Sketch of the Lakes — Author's regret of his youth which was passed amongst them — Short description of Noon — Cascade — Noontide Retreat — Precipice and sloping Lights — Face of Nature as the Sun declines — — Mountain-farm, and the Cock — Slate-quarry — Sunset — Superstition of the Country connected with that moment — Swans — Female Beggar — Twilight-sounds — Western Lights — Spirits — Night — Moonlight — Hope — Night-sounds — Conclusion.

AN EVENING WALK

FAR from my dearest Friend, 't is mine to rove
Through bare grey dell, high wood, and pastoral cove;
Where Derwent rests, and listens to the roar
That stuns the tremulous cliffs of high Lodore;
Where peace to Grasmere's lonely island leads,
To willowy hedge-rows, and to emerald meads;
Leads to her bridge, rude church, and cottaged
 grounds,
Her rocky sheepwalks, and her woodland bounds;
Where, undisturbed by winds, Winander sleeps¹
'Mid clustering isles, and holly-sprinkled steeps;
Where twilight glens endear my Esthwaite's shore,
And memory of departed pleasures, more.

Fair scenes, erewhile, I taught, a happy child,
The echoes of your rocks my carols wild:
The spirit sought not then, in cherished sadness,
A cloudy substitute for failing gladness.
In youth's keen eye the livelong day was bright,
The sun at morning, and the stars at night,
Alike, when first the bittern's hollow bill
Was heard, or woodcocks roamed the moonlight hill.²

In thoughtless gaiety I coursed the plain,
And hope itself was all I knew of pain;
For then, the inexperienced heart would beat
At times, while young Content forsook her seat,

¹ [See Notes in Volume X.]

AN EVENING WALK

And wild Impatience, pointing upward, showed,
Through passes yet unreached, a brighter road.
Alas! the idle tale of man is found
Depicted in the dial's moral round;
Hope with reflection blends her social rays
To gild the total tablet of his days;
Yet still, the sport of some malignant power,
He knows but from its shade the present hour.

But why, ungrateful, dwell on idle pain?
To show what pleasures yet to me remain,
Say, will my Friend, with unreluctant ear,
The history of a poet's evening hear?

When, in the south, the wan noon, brooding still,
Breathed a pale steam around the glaring hill,
And shades of deep-embattled clouds were seen,
Spotting the northern cliffs with lights between;
When crowding cattle, checked by rails that make
A fence far stretched into the shallow lake,
Lashed the cool water with their restless tails,
Or from high points of rock looked out for fanning gales:
When school-boys stretched their length upon the green;
And round the broad-spread oak, a glimmering scene,
In the rough fern-clad park, the herded deer
Shook the still-twinkling tail and glancing ear;
When horses in the sunburnt intake³ stood,
And vainly eyed below the tempting flood,

AN EVENING WALK

Or tracked the passenger, in mute distress,
With forward neck the closing gate to press —
Then, while I wandered where the huddling rill
Brightens with water-breaks the hollow ghyll ⁴
As by enchantment, an obscure retreat
Opened at once, and stayed my devious feet.
While thick above the rill the branches close,
In rocky basin its wild waves repose,
Inverted shrubs, and moss of gloomy green;
Cling from the rocks, with pale wood-weeds between;
And its own twilight softens the whole scene,
Save where aloft the subtle sunbeams shine
On withered briars that o'er the crags recline;
Save where, with sparkling foam, a small cascade
Illumines, from within, the leafy shade;
Beyond, along the vista of the brook,
Where antique roots its bustling course o'erlook,
The eye reposes on a secret bridge ⁵
Half grey, half shagged with ivy to its ridge;
There, bending o'er the stream, the listless swain
Lingers behind his disappearing wain.
— Did Sabine grace adorn my living line,
Blandusia's praise, wild stream, should yield to
thine!

Never shall ruthless minister of death
'Mid thy soft glooms the glittering steel unsheath;

AN EVENING WALK

No goblets shall, for thee, be crowned with flowers,
No kid with piteous outcry thrill thy bowers;
The mystic shapes that by thy margin rove
A more benignant sacrifice approve —
A mind, that, in a calm angelic mood
Of happy wisdom, meditating good,
Beholds, of all from her high powers required,
Much done, and much designed, and more desired, —
Harmonious thoughts, a soul by truth refined,
Entire affection for all human kind.

Dear Brook, farewell! To-morrow's noon again
Shall hide me, wooing long thy wildwood strain;
But now the sun has gained his western road,
And eve's mild hour invites my steps abroad.

While, near the midway cliff, the silvered kite
In many a whistling circle wheels her flight;
Slant watery lights, from parting clouds, apace
Travel along the precipice's base;
Cheering its naked waste of scattered stone,
By lichens grey, and scanty moss, o'ergrown;
Where scarce the foxglove peeps, or thistle's beard;
And restless stone-chat, all day long, is heard.

How pleasant, as the sun declines, to view
The spacious landscape change in form and hue!
Here, vanish, as in mist, before a flood
Of bright obscurity, hill, lawn, and wood;

AN EVENING WALK

There, objects, by the searching beams betrayed,
Come forth, and here retire in purple shade;
Even the white stems of birch, the cottage white,
Soften their glare before the mellow light;
The skiffs, at anchor where with umbrage wide
Yon chestnuts half the latticed boat-house hide,
Shed from their sides, that face the sun's slant beam,
Strong flakes of radiance on the tremulous stream:
Raised by yon travelling flock, a dusty cloud
Mounts from the road, and spreads its moving shroud;
The shepherd, all involved in wreaths of fire,
Now shows a shadowy speck, and now is lost entire.

Into a gradual calm the breezes sink,
A blue rim borders all the lake's still brink;
There doth the twinkling aspen's foliage sleep,
And insects clothe, like dust, the glassy deep:
And now, on every side, the surface breaks
Into blue spots, and slowly lengthening streaks;
Here, plots of sparkling water tremble bright
With thousand thousand twinkling points of light;
There, waves that, hardly weltering, die away,
Tip their smooth ridges with a softer ray;
And now the whole wide lake in deep repose
Is hushed, and like a burnished mirror glows,
Save where, along the shady western marge,
Coasts, with industrious oar, the charcoal barge.

AN EVENING WALK

Their panniered train a group of potters goad,
Winding from side to side up the steep road;
The peasant, from yon cliff of fearful edge
Shot, down the headlong path darts with his sledge;
Bright beams the lonely mountain-horse illumine
Feeding 'mid purple heath, "green rings,"⁶ and broom;
While the sharp slope the slackened team confounds,
Downward the ponderous timber-wain resounds;
In foamy breaks the rill, with merry song,
Dashed o'er the rough rock, lightly leaps along;
From lonesome chapel at the mountain's feet,
Three humble bells their rustic chime repeat;
Sounds from the water-side the hammered boat;
And *blasted* quarry thunders, heard remote!

Even here, amid the sweep of endless woods,
Blue pomp of lakes, high cliffs, and falling floods,
Not undelightful are the simplest charms,
Found by the grassy door of mountain-farms.

Sweetly ferocious,⁷ round his native walks,
Pride of his sister-wives, the monarch stalks;
Spur-clad his nervous feet, and firm his tread;
A crest of purple tops the warrior's head.
Bright sparks his black and rolling eye-ball hurls
Afar, his tail he closes and unfurls;
On tiptoe reared, he strains his clarion throat,
Threatened by faintly-answering farms remote:

AN EVENING WALK

Again with his shrill voice the mountain rings,
While, flapped with conscious pride, resound his wings.

Where, mixed with graceful birch, the sombrous pine
And yew-tree o'er the silver rocks recline;
I love to mark the quarry's moving trains,
Dwarf panniered steeds, and men, and numerous wains;
How busy all the enormous hive within,
While Echo dallies with its various din!
Some (hear you not their chisels' clinking sound?)
Toil, small as pigmies in the gulf profound;
Some, dim between the lofty cliffs descried,
O'erwalk the slender plank from side to side;
These, by the pale-blue rocks that ceaseless ring,
In airy baskets hanging, work and sing.

Just where a cloud above the mountain rears
An edge all flame, the broadening sun appears;
A long blue bar its ægis orb divides,
And breaks the spreading of its golden tides;
And now that orb has touched the purple steep
Whose softened image penetrates the deep.
'Cross the calm lake's blue shades the cliffs aspire,
With towers and woods, a "prospect all on fire";
While coves and secret hollows, through a ray
Of fainter gold, a purple gleam betray.
Each slip of lawn the broken rocks between
Shines in the light with more than earthly green:

AN EVENING WALK

Deep yellow beams the scattered stems illumine,
Far in the level forest's central gloom:
Waving his hat, the shepherd, from the vale,
Directs his winding dog the cliffs to scale, —
The dog, loud barking, 'mid the glittering rocks,
Hunts, where his master points, the intercepted
flocks.

Where oaks o'erhang the road the radiance shoots
On tawny earth, wild weeds, and twisted roots;
The druid-stones a brightened ring unfold;
And all the babbling brooks are liquid gold;
Sunk to a curve, the day-star lessens still,
Gives one bright glance, and drops behind the hill.⁸

In these secluded vales, if village fame,
Confirmed by hoary hairs, belief may claim;
When up the hills, as now, retired the light,
Strange apparitions mocked the shepherd's sight.

The form appears of one that spurs his steed
Midway along the hill with desperate speed;
Unhurt pursues his lengthened flight, while all
Attend, at every stretch, his headlong fall.
Anon, appears a brave, a gorgeous show
Of horsemen-shadows moving to and fro;
At intervals imperial banners stream,
And now the van reflects the solar beam;
The rear through iron brown betrays a sullen gleam.

AN EVENING WALK

While silent stands the admiring crowd below,
Silent the visionary warriors go,
Winding in ordered pomp ⁹ their upward way
Till the last banner of the long array
Has disappeared, and every trace is fled
Of splendour — save the beacon's spiry head
Tipt with eve's latest gleam of burning red.

Now, while the solemn evening shadows sail,
On slowly-waving pinions, down the vale;
And, fronting the bright west, yon oak entwines
Its darkening boughs and leaves, in stronger lines;
'T is pleasant near the tranquil lake to stray
Where, winding on along some secret bay,
The swan uplifts his chest, and backward flings
His neck, a varying arch, between his towering
wings:

The eye that marks the gliding creature sees
How graceful pride can be, and how majestic, ease.
While tender cares and mild domestic loves
With furtive watch pursue her as she moves,
The female with a meeker charm succeeds,
And her brown little-ones around her leads,
Nibbling the water-lilies as they pass,
Or playing wanton with the floating grass.
She, in a mother's care, her beauty's pride
Forgetting, calls the wearied to her side;

AN EVENING WALK

Alternately they mount her back, and rest
Close by her mantling wings' embraces prest.

Long may they float upon this flood serene;
Theirs be these holms untrodden, still, and green,
Where leafy shades fence off the blustering gale,
And breathes in peace the lily of the vale!
Yon isle, which feels not even the milkmaid's feet,
Yet hears her song, "by distance made more sweet,"
Yon isle conceals their home, their hut-like bower;
Green water-rushes overspread the floor;
Long grass and willows form the woven wall,
And swings above the roof the poplar tall.
Thence issuing often with unwieldy stalk,
They crush with broad black feet their flowery walk;
Or, from the neighbouring water, hear at morn
The hound, the horse's tread, and mellow horn;
Involve their serpent-necks in changeful rings,
Rolled wantonly between their slippery wings,
Or, starting up with noise and rude delight,
Force half upon the wave their cumbrous flight.

Fair Swan! by all a mother's joys caressed,
Haply some wretch has eyed, and called thee blessed;
When with her infants, from some shady seat
By the lake's edge, she rose—to face the noontide heat;
Or taught their limbs along the dusty road
A few short steps to totter with their load.

AN EVENING WALK

I see her now, denied to lay her head,
On cold blue nights, in hut or straw-built shed,
Turn to a silent smile their sleepy cry,
By pointing to the gliding moon on high.
— When low-hung clouds each star of summer
hide,

And fireless are the valleys far and wide,
Where the brook brawls along the public road
Dark with bat-haunted ashes stretching broad,
Oft has she taught them on her lap to lay
The shining glow-worm; or, in heedless play,
Toss it from hand to hand, disquieted;
While others, not unseen, are free to shed
Green unmolested light upon their mossy bed.

Oh! when the sleety showers her path assail,
And like a torrent roars the headstrong gale;
No more her breath can thaw their fingers cold,
Their frozen arms her neck no more can fold;
Weak roof a cowering form two babes to shield,
And faint the fire a dying heart can yield!
Press the sad kiss, fond mother! vainly fears
Thy flooded cheek to wet them with its tears;
No tears can chill them, and no bosom warms,
Thy breast their death-bed, confined in thine arms!

Sweet are the sounds that mingle from afar,
Heard by calm lakes, as peeps the folding star,

AN EVENING WALK

Where the duck dabbles 'mid the rustling sedge,
And feeding pike starts from the water's edge,
Or the swan stirs the reeds, his neck and bill
Wetting, that drip upon the water still;
And heron, as resounds the trodden shore,
Shoots upward, darting his long neck before.

Now, with religious awe, the farewell light
Blends with the solemn colouring of night;
'Mid groves of clouds that crest the mountain's brow,
And round the west's proud lodge their shadows throw,
Like Una shining on her gloomy way,
The half-seen form of Twilight roams astray;
Shedding, through paly loop-holes mild and small,
Gleams that upon the lake's still bosom fall;
Soft o'er the surface creep those lustres pale
Tracking the motions of the fitful gale.
With restless interchange at once the bright
Wins on the shade, the shade upon the light.
No favoured eye was e'er allowed to gaze
On lovelier spectacle in faery days;
When gentle Spirits urged a sportive chase,
Brushing with lucid wands the water's face:
While music, stealing round the glimmering deeps,
Charmed the tall circle of the enchanted steeps.
— The lights are vanished from the watery plains:
No wreck of all the pageantry remains.

AN EVENING WALK

Unheeded night has overcome the vales:
On the dark earth the wearied vision fails;
The latest lingerer of the forest train,
The lone black fir, forsakes the faded plain;
Last evening sight, the cottage smoke, no more,
Lost in the thickened darkness, glimmers hoar;
And, towering from the sullen dark-brown mere,
Like a black wall, the mountain-steeps appear.
— Now o'er the soothed accordant heart we feel
A sympathetic twilight slowly steal,
And ever, as we fondly muse, we find
The soft gloom deepening on the tranquil mind.
Stay! pensive, sadly-pleasing visions, stay!
Ah no! as fades the vale, they fade away:
Yet still the tender, vacant gloom remains;
Still the cold cheek its shuddering tear retains.

The bird, who ceased, with fading light, to thread
Silent the hedge or steamy rivulet's bed,
From his grey re-appearing tower shall soon
Salute with gladsome note the rising moon,
While with a hoary light she frosts the ground,
And pours a deeper blue to Æther's bound;
Pleased, as she moves, her pomp of clouds to fold
In robes of azure, fleecy-white, and gold.

Above yon eastern hill, where darkness broods
O'er all its vanished dells, and lawns, and woods;

AN EVENING WALK

Where but a mass of shade the sight can trace,
Even now she shews, half-veiled, her lovely face:
Across the gloomy valley flings her light,
Far to the western slopes with hamlets white;
And gives, where woods the chequered upland strew,
To the green corn of summer, autumn's hue.

Thus Hope, first pouring from her blessed horn
Her dawn, far lovelier than the moon's own morn,
Till higher mounted, strives in vain to cheer
The weary hills, impervious, blackening near;
Yet does she still, undaunted, throw the while
On darling spots remote her tempting smile.

Even now she decks for me a distant scene,
(For dark and broad the gulf of time between)
Gilding that cottage with her fondest ray,
(Sole bourn, sole wish, sole object of my way;
How fair its lawns and sheltering woods appear!
How sweet its streamlet murmurs in mine ear!)
Where we, my Friend, to happy days shall rise,
Till our small share of hardly-paining sighs
(For sighs will ever trouble human breath)
Creep hushed into the tranquil breast of death.

But now the clear bright Moon her zenith gains,
And, rimy without speck, extend the plains:
The deepest cleft the mountain's front displays
Scarce hides a shadow from her searching rays;

AN EVENING WALK

From the dark-blue faint silvery threads divide
The hills, while gleams below the azure tide;
Time softly treads; throughout the landscape
breathes

A peace enlivened, not disturbed, by wreaths
Of charcoal-smoke, that o'er the fallen wood,
Steal down the hill, and spread along the flood.

The song of mountain-streams, unheard by day,
Now hardly heard, beguiles my homeward way.
Air listens, like the sleeping water, still,
To catch the spiritual music of the hill,
Broke only by the slow clock tolling deep,
Or shout that wakes the ferry-man from sleep,
The echoed hoof nearing the distant shore,
The boat's first motion — made with dashing oar;
Sound of closed gate, across the water borne,
Hurrying the timid hare through rustling corn;
The sportive outcry of the mocking owl;
And at long intervals the mill-dog's howl;
The distant forge's swinging thump profound;
Or yell, in the deep woods, of lonely hound.

LINES

WRITTEN WHILE SAILING IN A BOAT AT EVENING

1789 1798

This title is scarcely correct. It was during a solitary walk on the banks of the Cam that I was first struck with this appearance, and applied it to my own feelings in the manner here expressed, changing the scene to the Thames, near Windsor. This, and the three stanzas of the following poem, "Remembrance of Collins," formed one piece; but, upon the recommendation of Coleridge, the three last stanzas were separated from the other.

How richly glows the water's breast
Before us, tinged with evening hues,
While, facing thus the crimson west,
The boat her silent course pursues!
And see how dark the backward stream!
A little moment past so smiling!
And still, perhaps, with faithless gleam,
Some other loiterers beguiling.

Such views the youthful Bard allure;
But, heedless of the following gloom,
He deems their colours shall endure
Till peace go with him to the tomb.

LINES

— And let him nurse his fond deceit,
And what if he must die in sorrow!
Who would not cherish dreams so sweet,
Though grief and pain may come to-morrow?

REMEMBRANCE OF COLLINS

COMPOSED UPON THE THAMES NEAR RICHMOND

1789 1798

GLIDE gently, thus for ever glide,
O Thames! that other bards may see
As lovely visions by thy side
As now, fair river! come to me.
O glide, fair stream! for ever so,
Thy quiet soul on all bestowing,
Till all our minds for ever flow
As thy deep waters now are flowing.

Vain thought! — Yet be as now thou art,
That in thy waters may be seen
The image of a poet's heart,
How bright, how solemn, how serene!
Such as did once the Poet bless,
Who murmuring here a later ditty,¹⁰
Could find no refuge from distress
But in the milder grief of pity.

Now let us, as we float along,
For *him* suspend the dashing oar;

REMEMBRANCE OF COLLINS

And pray that never child of song
May know that Poet's sorrows more.
How calm! how still! the only sound,
The dripping of the oar suspended!
— The evening darkness gathers round
By virtue's holiest Powers attended.

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

TAKEN DURING A PEDESTRIAN TOUR AMONG THE ALPS

1791-2 1793

Much the greatest part of this poem was composed during my walks upon the banks of the Loire in the years 1791, 1792. I will only notice that the description of the valley filled with mist, beginning —“In solemn shapes,” was taken from that beautiful region of which the principal features are Lungarn and Sarnen. Nothing that I ever saw in Nature left a more delightful impression on my mind than that which I have attempted, alas! how feebly, to convey to others in these lines. Those two lakes have always interested me especially, from bearing, in their size and other features, a resemblance to those of the North of England. It is much to be deplored that a district so beautiful should be so unhealthy as it is.

TO

THE REV. ROBERT JONES

FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

DEAR SIR,

However desirous I might have been of giving you proofs of the high place you hold in my esteem, I should have been cautious of wounding your delicacy by thus publicly addressing you, had not the circumstance of our having been companions among the Alps, seemed to give this dedication a propriety sufficient to do away any scruples which your modesty might otherwise have suggested.

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

In inscribing this little work to you, I consult my heart. You know well how great is the difference between two companions lolling in a post-chaise, and two travellers plodding slowly along the road, side by side, each with his little knapsack of necessities upon his shoulders. How much more of heart between the two latter!

I am happy in being conscious that I shall have one reader who will approach the conclusion of these few pages with regret. You they must certainly interest, in reminding you of moments to which you can hardly look back without a pleasure not the less dear from a shade of melancholy. You will meet with few images without recollecting the spot where we observed them together; consequently, whatever is feeble in my design, or spiritless in my colouring, will be amply supplied by your own memory.

With still greater propriety I might have inscribed to you a description of some of the features of your native mountains, through which we have wandered together, in the same manner, with so much pleasure. But the sea-sunsets, which give such splendour to the vale of Clwyd, Snowdon, the chair of Idris, the quiet village of Bethgelert, Menai and her Druids, the Alpine steeps of the Conway, and the still more interesting windings of the wizard stream of the Dee, remain yet untouched. Apprehensive that my pencil may never be exercised on these subjects, I cannot let slip this opportunity of thus publicly assuring you with how much affection and esteem

I am, dear Sir,

Most sincerely yours,

W. WORDSWORTH.

LONDON, 1793.

Happiness (if she had been to be found on earth) among the charms of Nature — Pleasures of the pedestrian Traveller — Author crosses France to the Alps — Present state of the

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Grande Chartreuse — Lake of Como — Time, Sunset — Same Scene, Twilight — Same Scene, Morning; its voluptuous Character; Old man and forest-cottage music — River Tusa — Via Mala and Grison Gipsy — Sckellenenthal — Lake of Uri — Stormy sunset — Chapel of William Tell — Force of local emotion — Chamois-chaser — View of the higher Alps — Manner of life of a Swiss mountaineer, interspersed with views of the higher Alps — Golden Age of the Alps — Life and views continued — Ranz des Vaches, famous Swiss Air — Abbey of Einsiedlen and its pilgrims — Valley of Chamouny — Mont Blanc — Slavery of Savoy — Influence of liberty on cottage-happiness — France — Wish for the Extirpation of Slavery — Conclusion.

WERE there, below, a spot of holy ground
Where from distress a refuge might be found,
And solitude prepare the soul for heaven;
Sure, Nature's God that spot to man had given
Where falls the purple morning far and wide
In flakes of light upon the mountain side;
Where with loud voice the power of water shakes
The leafy wood, or sleeps in quiet lakes.
Yet not unrecompensed the man shall roam,
Who at the call of summer quits his home,
And plods through some wide realm o'er vale and
height,
Though seeking only holiday delight;
At least, not owning to himself an aim
To which the sage would give a prouder name.

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

No gains too cheaply earned his fancy cloy,
Though every passing zephyr whispers joy;
Brisk toil, alternating with ready ease,
Feeds the clear current of his sympathies.
For him sod-seats the cottage-door adorn;
And peeps the far-off spire, his evening bourn!
Dear is the forest frowning o'er his head,
And dear the velvet green-sward to his tread:
Moves there a cloud o'er mid-day's flaming eye?
Upward he looks — "and calls it luxury":
Kind Nature's charities his steps attend;
In every babbling brook he finds a friend;
While chastening thoughts of sweetest use, bestowed
By wisdom, moralise his pensive road.
Host of his welcome inn, the noon-tide bower,
To his spare meal he calls the passing poor;
He views the sun uplift his golden fire,
Or sink, with heart alive like Memnon's lyre;¹¹
Blesses the moon that comes with kindly ray,
To light him shaken by his rugged way.
Back from his sight no bashful children steal;
He sits a brother at the cottage-meal;
His humble looks no shy restraint impart;
Around him plays at will the virgin heart.
While unsuspected wheels the village dance,
The maidens eye him with enquiring glance,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Much wondering by what fit of crazing care,
Or desperate love, bewildered, he came there.

A hope, that prudence could not then approve,
That clung to Nature with a truant's love,
O'er Gallia's wastes of corn my footsteps led;
Her files of road-elms, high above my head
In long-drawn vista, rustling in the breeze;
Or where her pathways straggle as they please
By lonely farms and secret villages.
But lo! the Alps ascending white in air,
Toy with the sun and glitter from afar.

And now, emerging from the forest's gloom,
I greet thee, Chartreuse, while I mourn thy doom.
Whither is fled that Power whose frown severe
Awed sober Reason till she crouched in fear?
That Silence, once in deathlike fetters bound,
Chains that were loosened only by the sound
Of holy rites chanted in measured round?
— The voice of blasphemy the fane alarms,
The cloister startles at the gleam of arms.
The thundering tube the aged angler hears,
Bent o'er the groaning flood that sweeps away his tears.
Cloud-piercing pine-trees nod their troubled heads,
Spires, rocks, and lawns a browner night o'erspreads;
Strong terror checks the female peasant's sighs,
And start the astonished shades at female eyes.

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

From Bruno's forest screams the affrighted jay,
And slow the insulted eagle wheels away.
A viewless flight of laughing Demons mock
The Cross,¹² by angels planted on the aërial rock.
The "parting Genius" sighs with hollow breath
Along the mystic streams of Life and Death.¹³
Swelling the outcry dull, that long resounds
Portentous through her old woods' trackless bounds,
Vallombre,¹⁴ 'mid her falling fanes, deplores,
For ever broke, the sabbath of her bowers.

More pleased, my foot the hidden margin roves
Of Como, bosomed deep in chestnut groves.
No meadows thrown between, the giddy steeps
Tower, bare or sylvan, from the narrow deeps.
— To towns, whose shades of no rude noise complain,
From ringing team apart and grating wain —
To flat-roofed towns, that touch the water's bound,
Or lurk in woody sunless glens profound,
Or, from the bending rocks, obtrusive cling,
And o'er the whitened wave their shadows fling —
The pathway leads, as round the steeps it twines;
And Silence loves its purple roof of vines.
The loitering traveller hence, at evening, sees
From rock-hewn steps the sail between the trees;
Or marks, 'mid opening cliffs, fair dark-eyed maids
Tend the small harvest of their garden glades;

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Or stops the solemn mountain-shades to view
Stretch o'er the pictured mirror broad and blue,
And track the yellow lights from steep to steep,
As up the opposing hills they slowly creep.
Aloft, here, half a village shines, arrayed
In golden light; half hides itself in shade;
While, from amid the darkened roofs, the spire,
Restlessly flashing, seems to mount like fire:
There, all unshaded, blazing forests throw
Rich golden verdure on the lake below.
Slow glides the sail along the illumined shore,
And steals into the shade the lazy oar;
Soft bosoms breathe around contagious sighs,
And amorous music on the water dies.

How blest, delicious scene! the eye that greets
Thy open beauties, or thy lone retreats;
Beholds the unwearied sweep of wood that scales
Thy cliffs; the endless waters of thy vales;
Thy lowly cots that sprinkle all the shore,
Each with its household boat beside the door;
Thy torrents shooting from the clear-blue sky;
Thy towns, that cleave, like swallows' nests, on high;
That glimmer hoar in eve's last light, descried
Dim from the twilight water's shaggy side,
Whence lutes and voices down the enchanted woods
Steal, and compose the oar-forgotten floods;

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Thy lake, that, streaked or dappled, blue or grey,
'Mid smoking woods gleams hid from morning's ray
Slow-travelling down the western hills, to enfold
Its green-tinged margin in a blaze of gold;
Thy glittering steeples, whence the matin bell
Calls forth the woodman from his desert cell,
And quickens the blithe sound of oars that pass
Along the steaming lake, to early mass.
But now farewell to each and all — adieu
To every charm, and last and chief to you,
Ye lovely maidens that in noontide shade
Rest near your little plots of wheaten glade;
To all that binds the soul in powerless trance,
Lip-dewing song, and ringlet-tossing dance;
Where sparkling eyes and breaking smiles illumine
The sylvan cabin's lute-enlivened gloom.
— Alas! the very murmur of the streams
Breathes o'er the failing soul voluptuous dreams,
While Slavery, forcing the sunk mind to dwell
On joys that might disgrace the captive's cell,
Her shameless timbrel shakes on Como's marge
And lures from bay to bay the vocal barge.

Yet are thy softer arts with power indued
To soothe and cheer the poor man's solitude.
By silent cottage doors, the peasant's home
Left vacant for the day, I loved to roam.

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

But once I pierced the mazes of a wood
In which a cabin undeserted stood;
There an old man an olden measure scanned
On a rude viol touched with withered hand.
As lambs or fawns in April clustering lie
Under a hoary oak's thin canopy,
Stretched at his feet, with steadfast upward eye,
His children's children listened to the sound;
— A Hermit with his family around!

But let us hence; for fair Locarno smiles
Embowered in walnut slopes and citron isles:
Or seek at eve the banks of Tusa's stream,
Where, 'mid dim towers and woods, her waters gleam.¹⁵
From the bright wave, in solemn gloom, retire
The dull-red steeps, and, darkening still, aspire
To where afar rich orange lustres glow
Round undistinguished clouds, and rocks, and snow:
Or, led where Via Mala's chasms confine
The indignant waters of the infant Rhine,
Hang o'er the abyss, whose else impervious gloom
His burning eyes with fearful light illumine.

The mind condemned, without reprieve, to go
O'er life's long deserts with its charge of woe,
With sad congratulation joins the train
Where beasts and men together o'er the plain
Move on — a mighty caravan of pain:

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Hope, strength, and courage, social suffering brings,
Freshening the wilderness with shades and springs.

— There be whose lot far otherwise is cast :

Sole human tenant of the piny waste,

By choice or doom a gipsy wanders here,

A nursling babe her only comforter;

Lo, where she sits beneath yon shaggy rock,

A cowering shape half hid in curling smoke!

When lightning among clouds and mountain-snows

Predominates, and darkness comes and goes,

And the fierce torrent, at the flashes broad

Starts, like a horse, beside the glaring road —

She seeks a covert from the battering shower

In the roofed bridge;¹⁶ the bridge, in that dread hour,

Itself all trembling at the torrent's power.

Nor is she more at ease on some *still* night,

When not a star supplies the comfort of its light;

Only the waning moon hangs dull and red

Above a melancholy mountain's head,

Then sets. In total gloom the Vagrant sighs,

Stoops her sick head, and shuts her weary eyes;

Or on her fingers counts the distant clock,

Or, to the drowsy crow of midnight cock,

Listens, or quakes while from the forest's gulf

Howls near and nearer yet the famished wolf.

From the green vale of Urseren smooth and wide

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Descend we now, the maddened Reuss our guide;
By rocks that, shutting out the blessed day,
Cling tremblingly to rocks as loose as they;
By cells¹⁷ upon whose image, while he prays,
The kneeling peasant scarcely dares to gaze;
By many a votive death-cross¹⁸ planted near,
And watered duly with the pious tear,
That faded silent from the upward eye
Unmoved with each rude form of peril nigh;
Fixed on the anchor left by Him who saves
Alike in whelming snows, and roaring waves.

But soon a peopled region on the sight
Opens — a little world of calm delight;
Where mists, suspended on the expiring gale,
Spread rooflike o'er the deep secluded vale,
And beams of evening slipping in between,
Gently illuminate a sober scene: —
Here, on the brown wood-cottages¹⁹ they sleep,
There, over rock or sloping pasture creep.
On as we journey, in clear view displayed,
The still vale lengthens underneath its shade
Of low-hung vapour: on the freshened mead
The green light sparkles; — the dim bowers recede.
While pastoral pipes and streams the landscape lull,
And bells of passing mules that tinkle dull,
In solemn shapes before the admiring eye

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Dilated hang the misty pines on high,
Huge convent domes with pinnacles and towers,
And antique castles seen through gleamy showers.

From such romantic dreams, my soul, awake!
To sterner pleasure, where, by Uri's lake,
In Nature's pristine majesty outspread,
Winds neither road nor path for foot to tread:
The rocks rise naked as a wall, or stretch
Far o'er the water, hung with groves of beech;
Aërial pines from loftier steeps ascend,
Nor stop but where creation seems to end.
Yet here and there, if 'mid the savage scene
Appears a scanty plot of smiling green,
Up from the lake a zigzag path will creep
To reach a small wood-hut hung boldly on the steep.
— Before those thresholds (never can they know
The face of traveller passing to and fro,
No peasant leans upon his pole, to tell
For whom at morning tolled the funeral bell;
Their watch-dog ne'er his angry bark foregoes,
Touched by the beggar's moan of human woes;
The shady porch ne'er offered a cool seat
To pilgrims overcome by summer's heat.
Yet thither the world's business finds its way
At times, and tales unsought beguile the day,
And *there* are those fond thoughts which Solitude,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

However stern, is powerless to exclude.

There doth the maiden watch her lover's sail

Approaching, and upbraid the tardy gale;

At midnight listens till his parting oar,

And its last echo, can be heard no more.

And what if ospreys, cormorants, herons, cry

Amid tempestuous vapours driving by,

Or hovering over wastes too bleak to rear

That common growth of earth, the foodful ear;

Where the green apple shrivels on the spray,

And pines the unripened pear in summer's kindest ray;

Contentment shares the desolate domain

With Independence, child of high Disdain.

Exulting 'mid the winter of the skies,

Shy as the jealous chamois, Freedom flies,

And grasps by fits her sword, and often eyes;

And sometimes, as from rock to rock she bounds,

The Patriot nymph starts at imagined sounds,

And, wildly pausing, oft she hangs aghast,

Whether some old Swiss air hath checked her haste

Or thrill of Spartan fire is caught between the blast.

Swoln with incessant rains from hour to hour,

All day the floods a deepening murmur pour:

The sky is veiled, and every cheerful sight:

Dark is the region as with coming night;

But what a sudden burst of overpowering light!

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Triumphant on the bosom of the storm,
Glances the wheeling eagle's glorious form!
Eastward, in long perspective glittering, shine
The wood-crowned cliffs that o'er the lake recline;
Those lofty cliffs a hundred streams unfold,
At once to pillars turned that flame with gold:
Behind his sail the peasant shrinks, to shun
The *west*, that burns like one dilated sun,
A crucible of mighty compass, felt
By mountains, glowing till they seem to melt.

But, lo! the boatman, overawed, before
The pictured fane of Tell suspends his oar;
Confused the Marathonian tale appears,
While his eyes sparkle with heroic tears.
And who, that walks where men of ancient days
Have wrought with godlike arm the deeds of praise,
Feels not the spirit of the place control,
Or rouse and agitate his labouring soul?
Say, who, by thinking on Canadian hills,
Or wild Aosta lulled by Alpine rills,
On Zutphen's plain; or on that highland dell,
Through which rough Garry cleaves his way, can tell
What high resolves exalt the tenderest thought
Of him whom passion rivets to the spot,
Where breathed the gale that caught Wolfe's happi-
est sigh,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

And the last sunbeam fell on Bayard's eye;
Where bleeding Sidney from the cup retired,
And glad Dundee in "faint huzzas" expired?

But now with other mind I stand alone
Upon the summit of this naked cone,
And watch the fearless chamois-hunter chase
His prey, through tracts abrupt of desolate space,
Through vacant worlds ²⁰ where Nature never gave
A brook to murmur or a bough to wave,
Which unsubstantial Phantoms sacred keep;
Thro' worlds where Life, and Voice, and Motion
sleep;

Where silent Hours their deathlike sway extend,
Save when the avalanche breaks loose, to rend
Its way with uproar, till the ruin, drowned
In some dense wood or gulf of snow profound,
Mocks the dull ear of Time with deaf abortive sound.
— 'T is his, while wandering on from height to height,
To see a planet's pomp and steady light
In the least star of scarce-appearing night;
While the pale moon moves near him, on the bound
Of ether, shining with diminished round,
And far and wide the icy summits blaze,
Rejoicing in the glory of her rays:
To him the day-star glitters small and bright,
Shorn of its beams, insufferably white,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

And he can look beyond the sun, and view
Those fast-receding depths of sable blue
Flying till vision can no more pursue!
— At once bewildering mists around him close,
And cold and hunger are his least of woes;
The Demon of the snow, with angry roar
Descending, shuts for aye his prison door.
Soon with despair's whole weight his spirits sink;
Bread has he none, the snow must be his drink;
And, ere his eyes can close upon the day,
The eagle of the Alps o'ershades her prey.

Now couch thyself where, heard with fear afar,
Thunders through echoing pines the headlong Aar;
Or rather stay to taste the mild delights
Of pensive Underwalden's pastoral heights.²¹
— Is there who 'mid these awful wilds has seen
The native Genii walk the mountain green?
Or heard, while other worlds their charms reveal,
Soft music o'er the aërial summit steal?
While o'er the desert, answering every close,
Rich steam of sweetest perfume comes and goes.
— And sure there is a secret Power that reigns
Here, where no trace of man the spot profanes,
Nought but the *chalets*,²² flat and bare, on high
Suspended 'mid the quiet of the sky;
Or distant herds that pasturing upward creep,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

And, not untended, climb the dangerous steep.
How still! no irreligious sound or sight
Rouses the soul from her severe delight.
An idle voice the sabbath region fills
Of Deep that calls to Deep across the hills,
And with that voice accords the soothing sound
Of drowsy bells, for ever tinkling round;
Faint wail of eagle melting into blue
Beneath the cliffs, and pine-woods' steady *sugh*; ²³
The solitary heifer's deepened low;
Or rumbling, heard remote, of falling snow.
All motions, sounds, and voices, far and nigh,
Blend in a music of tranquillity;
Save when, a stranger seen below, the boy
Shouts from the echoing hills with savage joy.

When, from the sunny breast of open seas,
And bays with myrtle fringed, the southern breeze
Comes on to gladden April with the sight
Of green isles widening on each snow-clad height;
When shouts and lowing herds the valley fill,
And louder torrents stun the noon-tide hill,
The pastoral Swiss begin the cliffs to scale,
Leaving to silence the deserted vale;
And like the Patriarchs in their simple age
Move, as the verdure leads, from stage to stage:
High and more high in summer's heat they go,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

And hear the rattling thunder far below;
Or steal beneath the mountains, half-deterred,
Where huge rocks tremble to the bellowing herd.

One I behold who, 'cross the foaming flood,
Leaps with a bound of graceful hardihood;
Another, high on that green ledge; — he gained
The tempting spot with every sinew strained;
And downward thence a knot of grass he throws,
Food for his beasts in time of winter snows.
— Far different life from what Tradition hoar
Transmits of happier lot in times of yore!
Then Summer lingered long; and honey flowed
From out the rocks, the wild bees' safe abode:
Continual waters welling cheered the waste,
And plants were wholesome, now of deadly taste:
Nor Winter yet his frozen stores had piled,
Usurping where the fairest herbage smiled:
Nor Hunger driven the herds from pastures bare,
To climb the treacherous cliffs for scanty fare.
Then the milk-thistle flourished through the land,
And forced the full-swoln udder to demand,
Thrice every day, the pail and welcome hand.
Thus does the father to his children tell
Of banished bliss, by fancy loved too well.
Alas! that human guilt provoked the rod
Of angry Nature to avenge her God.

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Still, Nature, ever just, to him imparts
Joys only given to uncorrupted hearts.

'T is morn: with gold the verdant mountain glows
More high, the snowy peaks with hues of rose.
Far-stretched beneath the many-tinted hills,
A mighty waste of mist the valley fills,
A solemn sea! whose billows wide around
Stand motionless, to awful silence bound:
Pines, on the coast, through mist their tops uprear,
That like to leaning masts of stranded ships appear.
A single chasm, a gulf of gloomy blue,
Gapes in the centre of the sea — and, through
That dark mysterious gulf ascending, sound
Innumerable streams with roar profound.
Mount through the nearer vapours notes of birds,
And merry flageolet; the low of herds,
The bark of dogs, the heifer's tinkling bell,
Talk, laughter, and perchance a church-tower knell:
Think not, the peasant from aloft has gazed
And heard with heart unmoved, with soul unraised:
Nor is his spirit less enrapt, nor less
Alive to independent happiness,
Then, when he lies, out-stretched, at eventide,
Upon the fragrant mountain's purple side:
For as the pleasures of his simple day
Beyond his native valley seldom stray,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Nought round its darling precincts can he find
But brings some past enjoyment to his mind;
While Hope, reclining upon Pleasure's urn,
Binds her wild wreaths, and whispers his return.

Once, Man entirely free, alone and wild,
Was blest as free — for he was Nature's child.
He, all superior but his God disdained,
Walked none restraining, and by none restrained,
Confessed no law but what his reason taught,
Did all he wished, and wished but what he ought.
As Man in his primeval dower arrayed
The image of his glorious Sire displayed,
Even so, by faithful Nature guarded, here
The traces of primeval Man appear;
The simple dignity no forms debase;
The eye sublime, and surly lion-grace
The slave of none, of beasts alone the lord,
His book he prizes, nor neglects his sword;
Well taught by that to feel his rights, prepared
With this "the blessings he enjoys to guard."

And, as his native hills encircle ground
For many a marvellous victory renowned,
The work of Freedom daring to oppose,
With few in arms,²⁴ innumerable foes,
When to those famous fields his steps are led,
An unknown power connects him with the dead:

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

For images of other worlds are there;
Awful the light, and holy is the air.
Fitfully, and in flashes, through his soul,
Like sun-lit tempests, troubled transports roll;
His bosom heaves, his Spirit towers amain,
Beyond the senses and their little reign.

And oft, when that dread vision hath past by,
He holds with God himself communion high,
There where the peal of swelling torrents fills
The sky-roofed temple of the eternal hills;
Or when, upon the mountain's silent brow
Reclined, he sees, above him and below,
Bright stars of ice and azure fields of snow;
While needle peaks of granite shooting bare
Tremble in ever-varying tints of air.
And when a gathering weight of shadows brown
Falls on the valleys as the sun goes down;
And Pikes, of darkness named and fear and storms,²⁵
Uplift in quiet their illumined forms,
In sea-like reach of prospect round him spread,
Tinged like an angel's smile all rosy red —
Awe in his breast with holiest love unites,
And the near heavens impart their own delights.

When downward to his winter hut he goes,
Dear and more dear the lessening circle grows;
That hut which on the hills so oft employs

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

His thoughts, the central point of all his joys.
And as a swallow, at the hour of rest,
Peeps often ere she darts into her nest,
So to the homestead, where the grandsire tends
A little prattling child, he oft descends,
To glance a look upon the well-matched pair;
Till storm and driving ice blockade him there.
There, safely guarded by the woods behind,
He hears the chiding of the baffled wind,
Hears Winter calling all his terrors round,
And, blest within himself, he shrinks not from the
 sound.

Through Nature's vale his homely pleasures glide,
Unstained by envy, discontent, and pride;
The bound of all his vanity, to deck,
With one bright bell, a favourite heifer's neck;
Well pleased upon some simple annual feast,
Remembered half the year and hoped the rest,
If dairy-produce, from his inner hoard,
Of thrice ten summers dignify the board.
— Alas! in every clime a flying ray
Is all we have to cheer our wintry way;
And here the unwilling mind may more than trace
The general sorrows of the human race;
The churlish gales of penury, that blow
Cold as the north-wind o'er a waste of snow,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

To them the gentle groups of bliss deny
That on the noon-day bank of leisure lie.
Yet more; — compelled by Powers which only deign
That *solitary* man disturb their reign,
Powers that support an unremitting strife
With all the tender charities of life,
Full oft the father, when his sons have grown
To manhood, seems their title to disown;
And from his nest amid the storms of heaven
Drives, eagle-like, those sons as he was driven;
With stern composure watches to the plain —
And never, eagle-like, beholds again!

When long-familiar joys are all resigned,
Why does their sad remembrance haunt the mind?
Lo! where through flat Batavia's willowy groves,
Or by the lazy Seine, the exile roves;
O'er the curled waters Alpine measures swell,
And search the affections to their inmost cell;
Sweet poison spreads along the listener's veins,
Turning past pleasures into mortal pains;
Poison, which not a frame of steel can brave,
Bows his young head with sorrow to the grave.²⁶
Gay lark of hope, thy silent song resume!
Ye flattering eastern lights, once more the hills illumine!
Fresh gales and dews of life's delicious morn,
And thou, lost fragrance of the heart, return!

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Alas! the little joy to man allowed
Fades like the lustre of an evening cloud;
Or like the beauty in a flower installed,
Whose season was, and cannot be recalled.
Yet, when opprest by sickness, grief, or care,
And taught that pain is pleasure's natural heir,
We still confide in more than we can know;
Death would be else the favourite friend of woe.

'Mid savage rocks, and seas of snow that shine,
Between interminable tracts of pine,
Within a temple stands an awful shrine,
By an uncertain light revealed, that falls
On the mute Image and the troubled walls.
Oh! give not me that eye of hard disdain
That views, undimmed, Einsiedlen's wretched fane.²⁷
While ghastly faces through the gloom appear,
Abortive joy, and hope that works in fear;
While prayer contends with silenced agony,
Surely in other thoughts contempt may die
If the sad grave of human ignorance bear
One flower of hope — oh, pass and leave it there!

The tall sun, pausing on an Alpine spire,
Flings o'er the wilderness a stream of fire:
Now meet we other pilgrims ere the day
Close on the remnant of their weary way;
While they are drawing toward the sacred floor

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Where, so they fondly think, the worm shall gnaw no
more.

How gaily murmur and how sweetly taste
The fountains ²⁸ reared for them amid the waste!
Their thirst they slake: — they wash their toil-worn
feet

And some with tears of joy each other greet.
Yes, I must see you when ye first behold
Those holy turrets tipped with evening gold;
In that glad moment will for you a sigh
Be heaved, of charitable sympathy;
In that glad moment when your hands are prest
In mute devotion on the thankful breast!

Last, let us turn to Chamouny that shields
With rocks and gloomy woods her fertile fields:
Five streams of ice amid her cots descend,
And with wild flowers and blooming orchards blend; —
A scene more fair than what the Grecian feigns
Of purple lights and ever-vernal plains;
Here all the seasons revel hand in hand:
'Mid lawns and shades by breezy rivulets fanned,
They sport beneath that mountain's matchless height
That holds no commerce with the summer night.
From age to age, throughout his lonely bounds
The crash of ruin fitfully resounds;
Appalling havoc! but serene his brow,

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Where daylight lingers on perpetual snow;
Glitter the stars above, and all is black below.

What marvel then if many a Wanderer sigh,
While roars the sullen Arve in anger by,
That not for thy reward, unrivalled Vale!
Waves the ripe harvest in the autumnal gale;
That thou, the slaves of slaves, art doomed to pine
And droop, while no Italian arts are thine,
To soothe or cheer, to soften or refine.

Hail Freedom! whether it was mine to stray,
With shrill winds whistling round my lonely way,
On the bleak sides of Cumbria's heath-clad moors,
Or where dank sea-weed lashes Scotland's shores;
To scent the sweets of Piedmont's breathing rose,
And orange gale that o'er Lugano blows;
Still have I found, where Tyranny prevails,
That virtue languishes and pleasure fails,
While the remotest hamlets blessings share
In thy loved presence known, and only there;
Heart-blessings — outward treasures, too, which the eye
Of the sun peeping through the clouds can spy,
And every passing breeze will testify.
There, to the porch, belike with jasmine bound
Or woodbine wreaths, a smoother path is wound;
The housewife there a brighter garden sees,
Where hum on busier wing her happy bees;

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

On infant cheeks there fresher roses blow;
And grey-haired men look up with livelier brow, —
To greet the traveller needing food and rest;
Housed for the night, or but a half-hour's guest.

And oh, fair France! though now the traveller sees
Thy three-striped banner fluctuate on the breeze;
Though martial songs have banished songs of love,
And nightingales desert the village grove,
Scared by the fife and rumbling drum's alarms,
And the short thunder, and the flash of arms;
That cease not till night falls, when far and nigh,
Sole sound, the Sourd ²⁹ prolongs his mournful cry!
— Yet, hast thou found that Freedom spreads her
power

Beyond the cottage-hearth, the cottage-door:
All Nature smiles, and owns beneath her eyes
Her fields peculiar, and peculiar skies.
Yes, as I roamed where Loiret's waters glide
Through rustling aspens heard from side to side,
When from October clouds a milder light
Fell where the blue flood rippled into white;
Methought from every cot the watchful bird
Crowed with ear-piercing power till then unheard;
Each clacking mill, that broke the murmuring streams,
Rocked the charmed thought in more delightful
dreams;

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

Chasing those pleasant dreams, the falling leaf
Awoke a fainter sense of moral grief;
The measured echo of the distant flail
Wound in more welcome cadence down the vale;
With more majestic course ³⁰ the water rolled,
And ripening foliage shone with richer gold.
— But foes are gathering — Liberty must raise
Red on the hills her beacon's far-seen blaze;
Must bid the tocsin ring from tower to tower! —
Nearer and nearer comes the trying hour!
Rejoice, brave Land, though pride's perverted ire
Rouse hell's own aid, and wrap thy fields in fire:
Lo, from the flames a great and glorious birth;
As if a new-made heaven were hailing a new earth!
— All cannot be: the promise is too fair
For creatures doomed to breathe terrestrial air:
Yet not for this will sober reason frown
Upon that promise, nor the hope disown;
She knows that only from high aims ensue
Rich guerdons, and to them alone are due.

Great God! by whom the strifes of men are
weighed

In an impartial balance, give thine aid
To the just cause; and, oh! do thou preside
Over the mighty stream now spreading wide:
So shall its waters, from the heavens supplied

DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES

In copious showers, from earth by wholesome springs,
Brood o'er the long-parched lands with Nile-like wings!
And grant that every sceptred child of clay
Who cries presumptuous, "Here the flood shall stay,"
May in its progress see thy guiding hand,
And cease the acknowledged purpose to withstand;
Or, swept in anger from the insulted shore,
Sink with his servile bands, to rise no more!

To-night, my Friend, within this humble cot
Be scorn and fear and hope alike forgot
In timely sleep; and when, at break of day,
On the tall peaks the glistening sunbeams play,
With a light heart our course we may renew,
The first whose footsteps print the mountain dew.

GUILT AND SORROW

OR, INCIDENTS UPON SALISBURY PLAIN

1791-4 1842

Unwilling to be unnecessarily particular, I have assigned this poem to the dates 1791 and '94; but in fact much of the "Female Vagrant's" story was composed at least two years before. All that relates to her sufferings as a sailor's wife in America, and her condition of mind during her voyage home, were faithfully taken from the report made to me of her own case by a friend who had been subjected to the same trials and affected in the same way. Mr. Coleridge, when I first became acquainted with him, was so much impressed with this poem, that it would have encouraged me to publish the whole as it then stood; but the mariner's fate appeared to me so tragical as to require a treatment more subdued and yet more strictly applicable in expression than I had at first given to it. This fault was corrected nearly fifty years afterwards, when I determined to publish the whole. It may be worth while to remark, that, though the incidents of this attempt do only in a small degree produce each other, and it deviates accordingly from the general rule by which narrative pieces ought to be governed, it is not therefore wanting in continuous hold upon the mind, or in unity, which is effected by the identity of moral interest that places the two personages upon the same footing in the reader's sympathies. My rambles over many parts of Salisbury Plain put me, as mentioned in the preface, upon writing this poem, and left on my mind imaginative impressions the force of which I have felt to this day. From that district I proceeded to Bath,

GUILT AND SORROW

Bristol, and so on to the banks of the Wye, where I took again to travelling on foot. In remembrance of that part of my journey, which was in '93, I began the verses — “Five years have passed.”

ADVERTISEMENT

PREFIXED TO THE FIRST EDITION OF THIS POEM,
PUBLISHED IN 1842

Not less than one third of the following poem, though it has from time to time been altered in the expression, was published so far back as the year 1798, under the title of “The Female Vagrant.” The extract is of such length that an apology seems to be required for reprinting it here: but it was necessary to restore it to its original position, or the rest would have been unintelligible. The whole was written before the close of the year 1794, and I will detail, rather as matter of literary biography than for any other reason, the circumstances under which it was produced.

During the latter part of the summer of 1793, having passed a month in the Isle of Wight, in view of the fleet which was then preparing for sea off Portsmouth at the commencement of the war, I left the place with melancholy forebodings. The American war was still fresh in memory. The struggle which was beginning, and which many thought would be brought to a speedy close by the irresistible arms of Great Britain being added to those of the allies, I was assured in my own mind would be of long continuance, and productive of distress and misery beyond all possible calculation. This conviction was pressed upon me by having been a witness, during a long residence in revolutionary France, of the spirit which prevailed in that country. After leaving the Isle of Wight, I spent two days in wandering on foot over Salisbury Plain, which, though cultivation was then widely spread through parts of it, had

GUILT AND SORROW

upon the whole a still more impressive appearance than it now retains.

The monuments and traces of antiquity, scattered in abundance over that region, led me unavoidably to compare what we know or guess of those remote times with certain aspects of modern society, and with calamities, principally those consequent upon war, to which, more than other classes of men, the poor are subject. In those reflections, joined with particular facts that had come to my knowledge, the following stanzas originated.

In conclusion, to obviate some distraction in the minds of those who are well acquainted with Salisbury Plain, it may be proper to say, that of the features described as belonging to it, one or two are taken from other desolate parts of England.

I

A TRAVELLER on the skirt of Sarum's Plain
Pursued his vagrant way, with feet half bare;
Stooping his gait, but not as if to gain
Help from the staff he bore; for mien and air
Were hardy, though his cheek seemed worn with care
Both of the time to come, and time long fled:
Down fell in straggling locks his thin grey hair;
A coat he wore of military red
But faded, and stuck o'er with many a patch and shred.

II

While thus he journeyed, step by step led on,
He saw and passed a stately inn, full sure

GUILT AND SORROW

That welcome in such house for him was none.
No board inscribed the needy to allure
Hung there, no bush proclaimed to old and poor
And desolate, "Here you will find a friend!"
The pendent grapes glittered above the door; —
On he must pace, perchance till night descend,
Where'er the dreary roads their bare white lines extend.

III

The gathering clouds grow red with stormy fire,
In streaks diverging wide and mounting high;
That inn he long had passed; the distant spire,
Which oft as he looked back had fixed his eye,
Was lost, though still he looked, in the blank sky.
Perplexed and comfortless he gazed around,
And scarce could any trace of man descry,
Save cornfields stretched and stretching without bound;
But where the sower dwelt was nowhere to be found.

IV

No tree was there, no meadow's pleasant green,
No brook to wet his lip or soothe his ear;
Long files of corn-stacks here and there were seen,
But not one dwelling-place his heart to cheer.
Some labourer, thought he, may perchance be near;
And so he sent a feeble shout — in vain;

GUILT AND SORROW

No voice made answer, he could only hear
Winds rustling over plots of unripe grain,
Or whistling thro' thin grass along the unfurrowed plain.

v

Long had he fancied each successive slope
Concealed some cottage, whither he might turn
And rest; but now along heaven's darkening cope
The crows rushed by in eddies, homeward borne.
Thus warned he sought some shepherd's spreading
thorn

Or hovel from the storm to shield his head,
But sought in vain; for now, all wild, forlorn,
And vacant, a huge waste around him spread;
The wet cold ground, he feared, must be his only bed.

vi

And be it so — for to the chill night shower
And the sharp wind his head he oft hath bared;
A Sailor he, who many a wretched hour
Hath told; for, landing after labour hard,
Full long endured in hope of just reward,
He to an armed fleet was forced away
By seamen, who perhaps themselves had shared
Like fate; was hurried off, a helpless prey,
'Gainst all that in *his* heart, or theirs perhaps, said nay.

GUILT AND SORROW

VII

For years the work of carnage did not cease,
And death's dire aspect daily he surveyed,
Death's minister; then came his glad release,
And hope returned, and pleasure fondly made
Her dwelling in his dreams. By Fancy's aid
The happy husband flies, his arms to throw
Round his wife's neck; the prize of victory laid
In her full lap, he sees such sweet tears flow
As if thenceforth nor pain nor trouble she could know.

VIII

Vain hope! for fraud took all that he had earned.
The lion roars and gluts his tawny brood
Even in the desert's heart; but he, returned,
Bears not to those he loves their needful food.
His home approaching, but in such a mood
That from his sight his children might have run.
He met a traveller, robbed him, shed his blood;
And when the miserable work was done
He fled, a vagrant since, the murderer's fate to shun.

IX

From that day forth no place to him could be
So lonely, but that thence might come a pang
Brought from without to inward misery.

GUILT AND SORROW

Now, as he plodded on, with sullen clang
A sound of chains along the desert rang;
He looked, and saw upon a gibbet high
A human body that in irons swang,
Uplifted by the tempest whirling by;
And, hovering, round it often did a raven fly.³¹

X

It was a spectacle which none might view,
In spot so savage, but with shuddering pain;
Nor only did for him at once renew
All he had feared from man, but roused a train
Of the mind's phantoms, horrible as vain.
The stones, as if to cover him from day,
Rolled at his back along the living plain;
He fell, and without sense or motion lay;
But, when the trance was gone, feebly pursued
his way.

XI

As one whose brain habitual phrensy fires
Owes to the fit in which his soul hath tossed
Profounder quiet, when the fit retires,
Even so the dire phantasma which had crossed
His sense, in sudden vacancy quite lost,
Left his mind still as a deep evening stream.

GUILT AND SORROW

Nor, if accosted now, in thought engrossed,
Moody, or inly troubled, would he seem
To traveller who might talk of any casual theme.

XII

Hurtle the clouds in deeper darkness piled,
Gone is the raven timely rest to seek;
He seemed the only creature in the wild
On whom the elements their rage might wreak;
Save that the bustard, of those regions bleak
Shy tenant, seeing by the uncertain light
A man there wandering, gave a mournful shriek,
And half upon the ground, with strange affright,
Forced hard against the wind a thick unwieldy flight.

XIII

All, all was cheerless to the horizon's bound;
The weary eye — which, wheresoe'er it strays,
Marks nothing but the red sun's setting round,
Or on the earth strange lines, in former days
Left by gigantic arms — at length surveys
What seems an antique castle spreading wide;
Hoary and naked are its walls, and raise
Their brow sublime: in shelter there to bide
He turned, while rain poured down smoking on every
side.

GUILT AND SORROW

XIV

Pile of Stone-henge! so proud to hint yet keep
Thy secrets, thou that lov'st to stand and hear
The Plain resounding to the whirlwind's sweep,
Inmate of lonesome Nature's endless year;
Even if thou saw'st the giant wicker rear
For sacrifice its throngs of living men,
Before thy face did ever wretch appear,
Who in his heart had groaned with deadlier pain
Than he who, tempest-driven, thy shelter now would
gain.

XV

Within that fabric of mysterious form,
Winds met in conflict, each by turns supreme;
And, from the perilous ground dislodged, through storm
And rain he wildered on, no moon to stream
From gulf of parting clouds one friendly beam,
Nor any friendly sound his footsteps led;
Once did the lightning's faint disastrous gleam
Disclose a naked guide-post's double head,
Sight which tho' lost at once a gleam of pleasure shed.

XVI

No swinging sign-board creaked from cottage elm
To stay his steps with faintness overcome;

GUILT AND SORROW

'T was dark and void as ocean's watery realm
Roaring with storms beneath night's starless gloom;
No gipsy cowered o'er fire of furze or broom;
No labourer watched his red kiln glaring bright,
Nor taper glimmered dim from sick man's room;
Along the waste no line of mournful light
From lamp of lonely toll-gate streamed athwart the
 night.

XVII

At length, though hid in clouds, the moon arose;
The downs were visible — and now revealed
A structure stands, which two bare slopes enclose.
It was a spot, where, ancient vows fulfilled,
Kind pious hands did to the Virgin build
A lonely Spital, the belated swain
From the night terrors of that waste to shield:
But there no human being could remain,
And now the walls are named the "Dead House" of
 the plain.

XVIII

Though he had little cause to love the abode
Of man, or covet sight of mortal face,
Yet when faint beams of light that ruin showed,
How glad he was at length to find some trace

GUILT AND SORROW

Of human shelter in that dreary place.
Till to his flock the early shepherd goes,
Here shall much-needed sleep his frame embrace.
In a dry nook where fern the floor bestrows
He lays his stiffened limbs, — his eyes begin to close;

XIX

When hearing a deep sigh, that seemed to come
From one who mourned in sleep, he raised his head,
And saw a woman in the naked room
Outstretched, and turning on a restless bed:
The moon a wan dead light around her shed.
He waked her — spake in tone that would not fail,
He hoped, to calm her mind; but ill he sped,
For of that ruin she had heard a tale
Which now with freezing thoughts did all her powers
assail;

XX

Had heard of one who, forced from storms to shroud,
Felt the loose walls of this decayed Retreat
Rock to incessant neighings shrill and loud,
While his horse pawed the floor with furious heat;
Till on a stone, that sparkled to his feet,
Struck, and still struck again, the troubled horse:
The man half raised the stone with pain and sweat,

GUILT AND SORROW

Half raised, for well his arm might lose its force
Disclosing the grim head of a late murdered corse.

XXI

Such tale of this lone mansion she had learned
And, when that shape, with eyes in sleep half
drowned,
By the moon's sullen lamp she first discerned,
Cold stony horror all her senses bound.
Her he addressed in words of cheering sound;
Recovering heart, like answer did she make;
And well it was that, of the corse there found,
In converse that ensued she nothing spake;
She knew not what dire pangs in him such tale
could wake.

XXII

But soon his voice and words of kind intent
Banished that dismal thought; and now the wind
In fainter howlings told its *rage* was spent:
Meanwhile discourse ensued of various kind,
Which by degrees a confidence of mind
And mutual interest failed not to create.
And, to a natural sympathy resigned,
In that forsaken building where they sate
The Woman thus retraced her own untoward fate.

GUILT AND SORROW

XXIII

“By Derwent’s side my father dwelt — a man
Of virtuous life, by pious parents bred;
And I believe that, soon as I began
To lisp, he made me kneel beside my bed,
And in his hearing there my prayers I said:
And afterwards, by my good father taught,
I read, and loved the books in which I read;
For books in every neighbouring house I sought,
And nothing to my mind a sweeter pleasure brought.

XXIV

“A little croft we owned — a plot of corn,
A garden stored with peas, and mint, and thyme,
And flowers for posies, oft on Sunday morn
Plucked while the church bells rang their earliest chime.
Can I forget our freaks at shearing time!
My hen’s rich nest through long grass scarce espied;
The cowslip-gathering in June’s dewy prime;
The swans that with white chests upreared in pride
Rushing and racing came to meet me at the water-side.

XXV

“The staff I well remember which upbore
The bending body of my active sire;
His seat beneath the honied sycamore

GUILT AND SORROW

Where the bees hummed, and chair by winter fire;
When market-morning came, the neat attire
With which, though bent on haste, myself I decked;
Our watchful house-dog, that would tease and tire
The stranger till its barking-fit I checked;
The red-breast, known for years, which at my casement
 pecked.

XXVI

“The suns of twenty summers danced along, —
Too little marked how fast they rolled away:
But, through severe mischance and cruel wrong,
My father’s substance fell into decay:
We toiled and struggled, hoping for a day
When Fortune might put on a kinder look;
But vain were wishes, efforts vain as they;
He from his old hereditary nook
Must part; the summons came; — our final leave we
 took.

XXVII

“It was indeed a miserable hour
When, from the last hill-top, my sire surveyed,
Peering above the trees, the steeple tower
That on his marriage day sweet music made!
Till then, he hoped his bones might there be laid

GUILT AND SORROW

Close by my mother in their native bowers:
Bidding me trust in God, he stood and prayed;—
I could not pray: — through tears that fell in showers
Glimmered our dear-loved home, alas! no longer ours!

XXVIII

“There was a Youth whom I had loved so long,
That when I loved him not I cannot say:
'Mid the green mountains many a thoughtless song
We two had sung, like gladsome birds in May;
When we began to tire of childish play,
We seemed still more and more to prize each other;
We talked of marriage and our marriage day;
And I in truth did love him like a brother,
For never could I hope to meet with such another.

XXIX

“Two years were passed since to a distant town
He had repaired to ply a gainful trade:
What tears of bitter grief, till then unknown!
What tender vows, our last sad kiss delayed!
To him we turned:— we had no other aid:
Like one revived, upon his neck I wept;
And her whom he had loved in joy, he said,
He well could love in grief; his faith he kept;
And in a quiet home once more my father slept.

GUILT AND SORROW

XXX

“We lived in peace and comfort; and were blest
With daily bread, by constant toil supplied.
Three lovely babes had lain upon my breast;
And often, viewing their sweet smiles, I sighed,
And knew not why. My happy father died,
When threatened war reduced the children’s meal:
Thrice happy! that for him the grave could hide
The empty loom, cold hearth, and silent wheel,
And tears that flowed for ills which patience might not
heal.

XXXI

“’T was a hard change; an evil time was come;
We had no hope, and no relief could gain:
But some, with proud parade, the noisy drum
Beat round to clear the streets of want and pain.
My husband’s arms now only served to strain
Me and his children hungering in his view;
In such dismay my prayers and tears were vain:
To join those miserable men he flew,
And now to the sea-coast, with numbers more, we drew.

XXXII

“There were we long neglected, and we bore
Much sorrow ere the fleet its anchor weighed;

GUILT AND SORROW

Green fields before us, and our native shore,
We breathed a pestilential air, that made
Ravage for which no knell was heard. We prayed
For our departure; wished and wished — nor knew,
'Mid that long sickness and those hopes delayed,
That happier days we never more must view.
The parting signal streamed — at last the land with-
drew.

XXXIII

“But the calm summer season now was past.
On as we drove, the equinoctial deep
Ran mountains high before the howling blast,
And many perished in the whirlwind's sweep.
We gazed with terror on their gloomy sleep,
Untaught that soon such anguish must ensue,
Our hopes such harvest of affliction reap,
That we the mercy of the waves should rue:
We reached the western world, a poor devoted crew.

XXXIV

“The pains and plagues that on our heads came down,
Disease and famine, agony and fear,
In wood or wilderness, in camp or town,
It would unman the firmest heart to hear.
All perished — all in one remorseless year,

GUILT AND SORROW

Husband and children! one by one, by sword
And ravenous plague, all perished: every tear
Dried up, despairing, desolate, on board
A British ship I waked, as from a trance restored."

XXXV

Here paused she, of all present thought forlorn,
Nor voice nor sound, that moment's pain expressed,
Yet Nature, with excess of grief o'erborne,
From her full eyes their watery load released.
He too was mute; and, ere her weeping ceased,
He rose, and to the ruin's portal went,
And saw the dawn opening the silvery east
With rays of promise, north and southward sent;
And soon with crimson fire kindled the firmament.

XXXVI

"O come," he cried, "come, after weary night
Of such rough storm, this happy change to view."
So forth she came, and eastward looked; the sight
Over her brow like dawn of gladness threw;
Upon her cheek, to which its youthful hue
Seemed to return, dried the last lingering tear,
And from her grateful heart a fresh one drew:
The whilst her comrade to her pensive cheer
Tempered fit words of hope; and the lark warbled near.

GUILT AND SORROW

XXXVII

They looked and saw a lengthening road, and wain
That rang down a bare slope not far remote:
The barrows glistered bright with drops of rain,
Whistled the waggoner with merry note,
The cock far off sounded his clarion throat;
But town, or farm, or hamlet, none they viewed,
Only were told there stood a lonely cot
A long mile thence. While thither they pursued
Their way, the Woman thus her mournful tale
renewed.

XXXVIII

“Peaceful as this immeasurable plain
Is now, by beams of dawning light imprest,
In the calm sunshine slept the glittering main;
The very ocean hath its hour of rest.
I too forgot the heavings of my breast.
How quiet 'round me ship and ocean were!
As quiet all within me. I was blest,
And looked, and fed upon the silent air
Until it seemed to bring a joy to my despair.

XXXIX

“Ah! how unlike those late terrific sleeps,
And groans that rage of racking famine spoke;

GUILT AND SORROW

The unburied dead that lay in festering heaps,
The breathing pestilence that rose like smoke,
The shriek that from the distant battle broke,
The mine's dire earthquake, and the pallid host
Driven by the bomb's incessant thunder-stroke
To loathsome vaults, where heart-sick anguish tossed,
Hope died, and fear itself in agony was lost!

XL

“Some mighty gulf of separation past,
I seemed transported to another world;
A thought resigned with pain, when from the mast
The impatient mariner the sail unfurled,
And, whistling, called the wind that hardly curled
The silent sea. From the sweet thoughts of home
And from all hope I was for ever hurled.
For me — farthest from earthly port to roam
Was best, could I but shun the spot where man
might come.

XLI

“And oft I thought (my fancy was so strong)
That I, at last, a resting-place had found;
‘Here will I dwell,’ said I, ‘my whole life long,
Roaming the illimitable waters round;
Here will I live, of all but heaven disowned,

GUILT AND SORROW

And end my days upon the peaceful flood.' —
To break my dream the vessel reached its bound;
And homeless near a thousand homes I stood,
And near a thousand tables pined and wanted
food.

XLII

“No help I sought; in sorrow turned adrift,
Was hopeless, as if cast on some bare rock;
Nor morsel to my mouth that day did lift,
Nor raised my hand at any door to knock.
I lay where, with his drowsy mates, the cock
From the cross-timber of an out-house hung:
Dismally tolled, that night, the city clock!
At morn my sick heart hunger scarcely stung,
Nor to the beggar's language could I fit my tongue.

XLIII

“So passed a second day; and, when the third
Was come, I tried in vain the crowd's resort.
— In deep despair, by frightful wishes stirred,
Near the sea-side I reached a ruined fort;
There, pains which Nature could no more support,
With blindness linked, did on my vitals fall;
And, after many interruptions short

GUILT AND SORROW

Of hideous sense, I sank, nor step could crawl:
Unsought for was the help that did my life recall.

XLIV

“Borne to a hospital, I lay with brain
Drowsy and weak, and shattered memory;
I heard my neighbours in their beds complain
Of many things which never troubled me —
Of feet still bustling round with busy glee,
Of looks where common kindness had no part,
Of service done with cold formality,
Fretting the fever round the languid heart,
And groans which, as they said, might make a dead
man start.

XLV

“These things just served to stir the slumbering sense,
Nor pain nor pity in my bosom raised.
With strength did memory return; and, thence
Dismissed, again on open day I gazed,
At houses, men, and common light, amazed.
The lanes I sought, and, as the sun retired,
Came where beneath the trees a faggot blazed,
The travellers saw me weep, my fate inquired,
And gave me food — and rest, more welcome, more
desired.

GUILT AND SORROW

XLVI

“Rough potters seemed they, trading soberly
With panniered asses driven from door to door;
But life of happier sort set forth to me,
And other joys my fancy to allure —
The bag-pipe dinning on the midnight moor
In barn uplighted; and companions boon,
Well met from far with revelry secure
Among the forest glades, while jocund June
Rolled fast along the sky his warm and genial moon.

XLVII

“But ill they suited me — those journeys dark
O’er moor and mountain, midnight theft to hatch!
To charm the surly house-dog’s faithful bark,
Or hang on tip-toe at the lifted latch.
The gloomy lantern, and the dim blue match,
The black disguise, the warning whistle shrill,
And ear still busy on its nightly watch,
Were not for me, brought up in nothing ill:
Besides, on griefs so fresh my thoughts were brood-
ing still.

XLVIII

“What could I do, unaided and unblest?
My father! gone was every friend of thine:

GUILT AND SORROW

And kindred of dead husband are at best
Small help; and, after marriage such as mine,
With little kindness would to me incline.
Nor was I then for toil or service fit;
My deep-drawn sighs no effort could confine;
In open air forgetful would I sit
Whole hours, with idle arms in moping sorrow knit.

XLIX

“The roads I paced, I loitered through the fields;
Contentedly, yet sometimes self-accused.
Trusted my life to what chance bounty yields,
Now coldly given, now utterly refused.
The ground I for my bed have often used:
But what afflicts my peace with keenest ruth,
Is that I have my inner self abused,
Foregone the home delight of constant truth,
And clear and open soul, so prized in fearless youth.

L

“Through tears the rising sun I oft have viewed,
Through tears have seen him towards that world
descend
Where my poor heart lost all its fortitude:
Three years a wanderer now my course I bend —
Oh! tell me whither — for no earthly friend

GUILT AND SORROW

Have I." — She ceased, and weeping turned away;
As if because her tale was at an end,
She wept; because she had no more to say
Of that perpetual weight which on her spirit lay.

LI

True sympathy the Sailor's looks expressed,
His looks — for pondering he was mute the while.
Of social Order's care for wretchedness,
Of Time's sure help to calm and reconcile,
Joy's second spring and Hope's long-treasured smile,
'T was not for *him* to speak — a man so tried.
Yet, to relieve her heart, in friendly style
Proverbial words of comfort he applied,
And not in vain, while they went pacing side by side.

LII

Ere long, from heaps of turf, before their sight,
Together smoking in the sun's slant beam,
Rise various wreaths that into one unite
Which high and higher mounts with silver gleam:
Fair spectacle, — but instantly a scream
Thence bursting shrill did all remark prevent;
They paused, and heard a hoarser voice blaspheme,
And female cries. Their course they thither bent,
And met a man who foamed with anger vehement.

GUILT AND SORROW

LIII

A woman stood with quivering lips and pale,
And, pointing to a little child that lay
Stretched on the ground, began a piteous tale;
How in a simple freak of thoughtless play
He had provoked his father, who straightway,
As if each blow were deadlier than the last,
Struck the poor innocent. Pallid with dismay
The Soldier's Widow heard and stood aghast;
And stern looks on the man her grey-haired Comrade
cast.

LIV

His voice with indignation rising high
Such further deed in manhood's name forbade;
The peasant, wild in passion, made reply
With bitter insult and revilings sad;
Asked him in scorn what business there he had;
What kind of plunder he was hunting now;
The gallows would one day of him be glad; —
Though inward anguish damped the Sailor's brow,
Yet calm he seemed as thoughts so poignant would allow.

LV

Softly he stroked the child, who lay outstretched
With face to earth; and, as the boy turned round

GUILT AND SORROW

His battered head, a groan the Sailor fetched
As if he saw — there and upon that ground —
Strange repetition of the deadly wound
He had himself inflicted. Through his brain
At once the griding iron passage found;
Deluge of tender thoughts then rushed amain,
Nor could his sunken eyes the starting tear restrain.

LVI

Within himself he said — What hearts have we!
The blessing this a father gives his child!
Yet happy thou, poor boy! compared with me,
Suffering not doing ill — fate far more mild.
The stranger's looks and tears of wrath beguiled
The father, and relenting thoughts awoke;
He kissed his son — so all was reconciled.
Then, with a voice which inward trouble broke
Ere to his lips it came, the Sailor them bespoke.

LVII

“Bad is the world, and hard is the world's law
Even for the man who wears the warmest fleece;
Much need have ye that time more closely draw
The bond of Nature, all unkindness cease,
And that among so few there still be peace:
Else can ye hope but with such numerous foes

GUILT AND SORROW

Your pains shall ever with your years increase?" —
While from his heart the appropriate lesson flows,
A correspondent calm stole gently o'er his woes.

LVIII

Forthwith the pair passed on; and down they look
Into a narrow valley's pleasant scene
Where wreaths of vapour tracked a winding brook,
That babbled on through groves and meadows green;
A low-roofed house peeped out the trees between;
The dripping groves resound with cheerful lays,
And melancholy lowings intervene
Of scattered herds, that in the meadow graze,
Some amid lingering shade, some touched by the sun's
 rays.

LIX

They saw and heard, and, winding with the road,
Down a thick wood, they dropt into the vale;
Comfort, by prouder mansions unbestowed,
Their wearied frames, she hoped, would soon regale.
Erelong they reached that cottage in the dale:
It was a rustic inn; — the board was spread,
The milk-maid followed with her brimming pail,
And lustily the master carved the bread,
Kindly the housewife pressed, and they in comfort fed.

GUILT AND SORROW

LX

Their breakfast done, the pair, though loth, must part;
Wanderers whose course no longer now agrees.
She rose and bade farewell! and, while her heart
Struggled with tears nor could its sorrow ease,
She left him there; for, clustering round his knees,
With his oak-staff the cottage children played;
And soon she reached a spot o'erhung with trees
And banks of ragged earth; beneath the shade
Across the pebbly road a little runnel strayed.

LXI

A cart and horse beside the rivulet stood;
Chequering the canvas roof the sunbeams shone.
She saw the carman bend to scoop the flood
As the wain fronted her, — wherein lay one,
A pale-faced Woman, in disease far gone.
The carman wet her lips as well behaved;
Bed under her lean body there was none;
Though even to die near one she most had loved,
She could not of herself those wasted limbs have moved.

LXII

The Soldier's Widow learned with honest pain
And homefelt force of sympathy sincere,
Why thus that worn-out wretch must there sustain

GUILT AND SORROW

The jolting road and morning air severe.
The wain pursued its way; and following near
In pure compassion she her steps retraced
Far as the cottage. "A sad sight is here,"
She cried aloud; and forth ran out in haste
The friends whom she had left but a few minutes
past.

LXIII

While to the door with eager speed they ran,
From her bare straw the Woman half upraised
Her bony visage — gaunt and deadly wan;
No pity asking, on the group she gazed
With a dim eye, distracted and amazed;
Then sank upon her straw with feeble moan.
Fervently cried the housewife — "God be praised,
I have a house that I can call my own;
Nor shall she perish there, untended and alone!"

LXIV

So in they bear her to the chimney seat,
And busily, though yet with fear, untie
Her garments, and, to warm her icy feet
And chafe her temples, careful hands apply.
Nature reviving, with a deep-drawn sigh
She strove, and not in vain, her head to rear;

GUILT AND SORROW

Then said — “I thank you all; if I must die,
The God in heaven my prayers for you will hear;
Till now I did not think my end had been so near.

LXV

“Barred every comfort labour could procure,
Suffering what no endurance could assuage,
I was compelled to seek my father’s door,
Though loth to be a burthen on his age.
But sickness stopped me in an early stage
Of my sad journey; and within the wain
They placed me — there to end life’s pilgrimage,
Unless beneath your roof I may remain;
For I shall never see my father’s door again.

LXVI

“My life, Heaven knows, hath long been burthensome;
But, if I have not meekly suffered, meek
May my end be! Soon will this voice be dumb:
Should child of mine e’er wander hither, speak
Of me, say that the worm is on my cheek. —
Torn from our hut, that stood beside the sea
Near Portland lighthouse in a lonesome creek,
My husband served in sad captivity
On shipboard, bound till peace or death should set him
free.

GUILT AND SORROW

LXVII

“A sailor’s wife I knew a widow’s cares,
Yet two sweet little ones partook my bed;
Hope cheered my dreams, and to my daily prayers
Our heavenly Father granted each day’s bread;
Till one was found by stroke of violence dead,
Whose body near our cottage chanced to lie;
A dire suspicion drove us from our shed;
In vain to find a friendly face we try,
Nor could we live together those poor boys and I;

LXVIII

“For evil tongues made oath how on that day
My husband lurked about the neighbourhood;
Now he had fled, and whither none could say,
And *he* had done the deed in the dark wood —
Near his own home! — but he was mild and good;
Never on earth was gentler creature seen;
He’d not have robbed the raven of its food.
My husband’s lovingkindness stood between
Me and all worldly harms and wrongs however keen.”

LXIX

Alas! the thing she told with labouring breath
The Sailor knew too well. That wickedness
His hand had wrought; and when, in the hour of death,

GUILT AND SORROW

He saw his Wife's lips move his name to bless
With her last words, unable to suppress
His anguish, with his heart he ceased to strive;
And, weeping loud in this extreme distress,
He cried — "Do pity me! That thou shouldst live
I neither ask nor wish — forgive me, but forgive!"

LXX

To tell the change that Voice within her wrought
Nature by sign or sound made no essay;
A sudden joy surprised expiring thought,
And every mortal pang dissolved away.
Borne gently to a bed, in death she lay;
Yet still while over her the husband bent,
A look was in her face which seemed to say,
"Be blest; by sight of thee from heaven was sent
Peace to my parting soul, the fulness of content."

LXXI

She slept in peace, — his pulses throbbed and stopped,
Breathless he gazed upon her face, — then took
Her hand in his, and raised it, but both dropped,
When on his own he cast a rueful look.
His ears were never silent; sleep forsook
His burning eyelids stretched and stiff as lead;
All night from time to time under him shook

GUILT AND SORROW

The floor as he lay shuddering on his bed;
And oft he groaned aloud, "O God, that I were
dead!"

LXXII

The Soldier's Widow lingered in the cot,
And, when he rose, he thanked her pious care
Through which his Wife, to that kind shelter brought,
Died in his arms; and with those thanks a prayer
He breathed for her, and for that merciful pair.
The corse interred, not one hour he remained
Beneath their roof, but to the open air
A burthen, now with fortitude sustained,
He bore within a breast where dreadful quiet reigned.

LXXIII

Confirmed of purpose, fearlessly prepared
For act and suffering, to the city straight
He journeyed, and forthwith his crime declared:
"And from your doom," he added, "now I wait,
Nor let it linger long, the murderer's fate."
Not ineffectual was that piteous claim;
"O welcome sentence which will end though late,"
He said, "the pangs that to my conscience came
Out of that deed. My trust, Saviour! is in thy
name!"

GUILT AND SORROW

LXXIV

His fate was pitied. Him in iron case
(Reader, forgive the intolerable thought)
They hung not: — no one on *his* form or face
Could gaze, as on a show by idlers sought;
No kindred sufferer, to his death-place brought
By lawless curiosity or chance,
When into storm the evening sky is wrought,
Upon his swinging corse an eye can glance,
And drop, as he once dropped, in miserable trance.

LINES

LEFT UPON A SEAT IN A YEW-TREE, WHICH STANDS NEAR
THE LAKE OF ESTHWAITE, ON A DESOLATE PART OF
THE SHORE, COMMANDING A BEAUTIFUL PROSPECT

1795 1798

Composed in part at school at Hawkshead. The tree has disappeared, and the slip of Common on which it stood, that ran parallel to the lake and lay open to it, has long been enclosed; so that the road has lost much of its attraction. This spot was my favourite walk in the evenings during the latter part of my school-time. The individual whose habits and character are here given, was a gentleman of the neighbourhood, a man of talent and learning, who had been educated at one of our Universities, and returned to pass his time in seclusion on his own estate. He died a bachelor in middle age. Induced by the beauty of the prospect, he built a small summer-house on the rocks above the peninsula on which the ferry-house stands. This property afterwards passed into the hands of the late Mr. Curwen. The site was long ago pointed out by Mr. West in his Guide, as the pride of the lakes, and now goes by the name of "The Station." So much used I to be delighted with the view from it, while a little boy, that some years before the first pleasure-house was built, I led thither from Hawkshead a youngster about my own age, an Irish boy, who was a servant to an itinerant conjuror. My motive was to witness the pleasure I expected the boy would receive from the prospect of the islands below and the intermingling water. I was not disappointed; and I hope the fact, insigni-

LINES

ficant as it may appear to some, may be thought worthy of note by others who may cast their eye over these notes.

NAY, Traveller! rest. This lonely Yew-tree stands
Far from all human dwelling: what if here
No sparkling rivulet spread the verdant herb?
What if the bee love not these barren boughs?
Yet, if the wind breathe soft, the curling waves,
That break against the shore, shall lull thy mind
By one soft impulse saved from vacancy.

Who he was

That piled these stones and with the mossy sod
First covered, and here taught this aged Tree
With its dark arms to form a circling bower,
I well remember. — He was one who owned
No common soul. In youth by science nursed,
And led by nature into a wild scene
Of lofty hopes, he to the world went forth
A favoured Being, knowing no desire
Which genius did not hallow; 'gainst the taint
Of dissolute tongues, and jealousy, and hate,
And scorn, — against all enemies prepared,
All but neglect. The world, for so it thought,
Owed him no service; wherefore he at once
With indignation turned himself away,
And with the food of pride sustained his soul
In solitude. — Stranger! these gloomy boughs

LINES

Had charms for him; and here he loved to sit,
His only visitants a straggling sheep,
The stone-chat, or the glancing sand-piper:
And on these barren rocks, with fern and heath,
And juniper and thistle, sprinkled o'er,
Fixing his downcast eye, he many an hour
A morbid pleasure nourished, tracing here
An emblem of his own unfruitful life:
And, lifting up his head, he then would gaze
On the more distant scene, — how lovely 't is
Thou seest, — and he would gaze till it became
Far lovelier, and his heart could not sustain
The beauty, still more beauteous! Nor, that time,
When Nature had subdued him to herself,
Would he forget those Beings to whose minds,
Warm from the labours of benevolence,
The world, and human life, appeared a scene
Of kindred loveliness: then he would sigh,
Inly disturbed, to think that others felt
What he must never feel: and so, lost Man!
On visionary views would fancy feed,
Till his eye streamed with tears. In this deep vale
He died, — this seat his only monument.

If Thou be one whose heart the holy forms
Of young imagination have kept pure,
Stranger! henceforth be warned; and know that pride,

LINES

Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
Is littleness; that he, who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used; that thought with him
Is in its infancy. The man whose eye
Is ever on himself doth look on one,
The least of Nature's works, one who might move
The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
Unlawful, ever. O be wiser, Thou!
Instructed that true knowledge leads to love;
True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart.

THE BORDERERS

A TRAGEDY

1795-96 1842

Of this dramatic work I have little to say in addition to the short note which will be found at the end of the volume. It was composed at Racedown in Dorsetshire during the latter part of the year 1795, and in the course of the following year. Had it been the work of a later period of life, it would have been different in some respects from what it is now. The plot would have been something more complex, and a greater variety of characters introduced to relieve the mind from the pressure of incidents so mournful. The manners also would have been more attended to. My care was almost exclusively given to the passions and the characters, and the position in which the persons in the Drama stood relatively to each other, that the reader (for I had then no thought of the Stage) might be moved, and to a degree instructed, by lights penetrating somewhat into the depths of our nature. In this endeavour, I cannot think, upon a very late review, that I have failed. As to the scene and period of action, little more was required for my purpose than the absence of established law and government; so that the agents might be at liberty to act on their own impulses. Nevertheless I do remember that, having a wish to colour the manners in some degree from local history more than my knowledge enabled me to do, I read Redpath's History of the Borders, but found there nothing to my purpose. I once made an observation to Sir Walter Scott, in which he concurred, that it was difficult to conceive how so dull a book could be written on such a subject. Much about the same time, but a little after, Coleridge was employed in writing his tragedy of "Remorse," and it happened that soon after, through one of the Mr. Pooles, Mr. Knight the actor heard that we had been engaged in writing Plays, and upon his suggestion mine was curtailed, and I believe Coleridge's also was offered to Mr. Harris, manager of Covent Garden. For myself, I had no hope nor even a wish (though a successful play would, in the then state of my finances, have been a most welcome piece of good fortune) that he should accept my performance; so that I incurred no disappointment when

THE BORDERERS

the piece was *judiciously* returned as not calculated for the Stage. In this judgment I entirely concurred, and had it been otherwise, it was so natural for me to shrink from public notice, that any hope I might have had of success would not have reconciled me altogether to such an exhibition. Mr. C.'s Play was, as is well known, brought forward several years after through the kindness of Mr. Sheridan. In conclusion I may observe that while I was composing this Play I wrote a short essay illustrative of that constitution and those tendencies of human nature which make the apparently *motiveless* actions of bad men intelligible to careful observers. This was partly done with reference to the character of Oswald, and his persevering endeavour to lead the man he disliked into so heinous a crime; but still more to preserve in my distinct remembrance what I had observed of transition in character, and the reflections I had been led to make during the time I was a witness of the changes through which the French Revolution passed.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MARMADUKE	}	<i>Of the Band of Borderers.</i>
OSWALD		
WALLACE		
LACY		
LENNOX		
HERBERT.		
WILFRED, <i>Servant to Marmaduke.</i>		
Host.		
Forester.		
ELDRED, <i>a Peasant.</i>		
Peasant, Pilgrims, etc.		
IDONEA.		
Female Beggar.		
ELEANOR, <i>Wife to Eldred.</i>		

SCENE — *Borders of England and Scotland.*

TIME — *The Reign of Henry III.*

Readers already acquainted with my Poems will recognise, in the following composition, some eight or ten lines which I have not scrupled to retain in the places where they originally stood. It is proper, however, to add, that they would not have been used elsewhere, if I had foreseen the time when I might be induced to publish this Tragedy.

February 28, 1842.

THE BORDERERS

ACT I

SCENE — *Road in a Wood*

WALLACE and LACY

Lacy. The troop will be impatient; let us hie
Back to our post, and strip the Scottish Foray
Of their rich Spoil, ere they recross the Border.
— Pity that our young Chief will have no part
In this good service.

Wal. Rather let us grieve
That, in the undertaking which has caused
His absence, he hath sought, whate'er his aim,
Companionship with One of crooked ways,
From whose perverted soul can come no good
To our confiding, open-hearted Leader.

Lacy. True; and, remembering how the Band have
 proved
That Oswald finds small favour in our sight,
Well may we wonder he has gained such power
Over our much-loved Captain.

Wal. I have heard
Of some dark deed to which in early life
His passion drove him — then a Voyager
Upon the midland Sea. You knew his bearing
In Palestine?

Lacy. Where he despised alike

THE BORDERERS

Mahommedan and Christian. But enough;
Let us begone — the Band may else be foiled.

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter MARMADUKE and WILFRED

Wil. Be cautious, my dear Master!

Mar. I perceive

That fear is like a cloak which old men huddle
About their love, as if to keep it warm.

Wil. Nay, but I grieve that we should part. This
Stranger,

For such he is ——

Mar. Your busy fancies, Wilfred,

Might tempt me to a smile; but what of him?

Wil. You know that you have saved his life.

Mar. I know it.

Wil. And that he hates you! — Pardon me, perhaps
That word was hasty.

Mar. Fy! no more of it.

Wil. Dear Master! gratitude's a heavy burden
To a proud Soul. — Nobody loves this Oswald —
Yourself, you do not love him.

Mar. I do more,

I honour him. Strong feelings to his heart
Are natural; and from no one can be learnt
More of men's thoughts and ways than his experience
Has given him power to teach: and then for courage

THE BORDERERS

And enterprise — what perils hath he shunned?
What obstacles hath he failed to overcome?
Answer these questions, from our common knowledge,
And be at rest.

Wil. Oh, Sir!

Mar. Peace, my good Wilfred;
Repair to Liddesdale, and tell the Band
I shall be with them in two days at farthest.

Wil. May He whose eye is over all protect you!

[*Exit.*

Enter OSWALD (a bunch of plants in his hand)

Osw. This wood is rich in plants and curious simples.

Mar. (looking at them). The wild rose, and the poppy,
and the nightshade:

Which is your favourite, Oswald?

Osw. That which, while it is
Strong to destroy, is also strong to heal —

[*Looking forward.*

Not yet in sight! — We'll saunter here awhile;
They cannot mount the hill, by us unseen.

Mar. (a letter in his hand). It is no common thing
when one like you

Performs these delicate services, and therefore
I feel myself much bounden to you, Oswald;

'T is a strange letter this! — You saw her write it?

Osw. And saw the tears with which she blotted it.

THE BORDERERS

Mar. And nothing less would satisfy him?

Osw.

No less;

For that another in his Child's affection
Should hold a place, as if 't were robbery,
He seemed to quarrel with the very thought.
Besides, I know not what strange prejudice
Is rooted in his mind; this Band of ours,
Which you've collected for the noblest ends,
Along the confines of the Esk and Tweed
To guard the Innocent — he calls us "Outlaws";
And, for yourself, in plain terms he asserts
This garb was taken up that indolence
Might want no cover, and rapacity
Be better fed.

Mar. Ne'er may I own the heart
That cannot feel for one, helpless as he is.

Osw. Thou know'st me for a Man not easily moved,
Yet was I grievously provoked to think
Of what I witnessed.

Mar. This day will suffice
To end her wrongs.

Osw. But if the blind Man's tale
Should *yet* be true?

Mar. Would it were possible!
Did not the soldier tell thee that himself,
And others who survived the wreck, beheld

THE BORDERERS

The Baron Herbert perish in the waves
Upon the coast of Cyprus?

Osw.

Yes, even so,

And I had heard the like before: in sooth
The tale of this his quondam Barony
Is cunningly devised; and, on the back
Of his forlorn appearance, could not fail
To make the proud and vain his tributaries,
And stir the pulse of lazy charity.
The seignories of Herbert are in Devon;
We, neighbours of the Esk and Tweed: 't is much
The Arch-Impostor ——

Mar.

Treat him gently, Oswald;

Though I have never seen his face, methinks,
There cannot come a day when I shall cease
To love him. I remember, when a Boy
Of scarcely seven years' growth, beneath the Elm
That casts its shade over our village school,
'T was my delight to sit and hear Idonea
Repeat her Father's terrible adventures,
Till all the band of playmates wept together;
And that was the beginning of my love.
And, through all converse of our later years,
An image of this old Man still was present,
When I had been most happy. Pardon me
If this be idly spoken.

THE BORDERERS

Osw.

See, they come,

Two Travellers!

Mar. (*points*). The woman is Idonea.

Osw. And leading Herbert.

Mar.

We must let them pass —

This thicket will conceal us.

[*They step aside.*

Enter IDONEA, leading HERBERT blind

Idon. Dear Father, you sigh deeply; ever since
We left the willow shade by the brook-side,
Your natural breathing has been troubled.

Her.

Nay,

You are too fearful; yet must I confess,
Our march of yesterday had better suited
A firmer step than mine.

Idon.

That dismal Moor —

In spite of all the larks that cheered our path,
I never can forgive it: but how steadily
You paced along, when the bewildering moonlight
Mocked me with many a strange fantastic shape! —
I thought the Convent never would appear;
It seemed to move away from us: and yet,
That you are thus the fault is mine; for the air
Was soft and warm, no dew lay on the grass,
And midway on the waste ere night had fallen
I spied a Covert walled and roofed with sods —
A miniature; belike some Shepherd-boy,

THE BORDERERS

Who might have found a nothing-doing hour
Heavier than work, raised it: within that hut
We might have made a kindly bed of heath
And thankfully there rested side by side
Wrapped in our cloaks, and, with recruited strength,
Have hailed the morning sun. But cheerily, Father,—
That staff of yours, I could almost have heart
To fling 't away from you: you make no use
Of me, or of my strength; — come, let me feel
That you do press upon me. There — indeed
You are quite exhausted. Let us rest awhile
On this green bank. *[He sits down.]*

Her. (after some time). Idonea, you are silent,
And I divine the cause.

Idon. Do not reproach me:
I pondered patiently your wish and will
When I gave way to your request; and now,
When I behold the ruins of that face,
Those eyeballs dark — dark beyond hope of light,
And think that they were blasted for my sake,
The name of Marmaduke is blown away.
Father, I would not change that sacred feeling
For all this world can give.

Her. Nay, be composed:
Few minutes gone a faintness overspread
My frame, and I bethought me of two things

THE BORDERERS

I ne'er had heart to separate — my grave,
And thee, my Child!

Idon.

Believe me, honoured Sire!

'T is weariness that breeds these gloomy fancies,
And you mistake the cause: you hear the woods
Resound with music, could you see the sun,
And look upon the pleasant face of Nature ——

Her. I comprehend thee — I should be as cheerful
As if we two were twins; two songsters bred
In the same nest, my spring-time one with thine.
My fancies, fancies if they be, are such
As come, dear Child! from a far deeper source
Than bodily weariness. While here we sit
I feel my strength returning. — The bequest
Of thy kind Patroness, which to receive
We have thus far adventured, will suffice
To save thee from the extreme of penury;
But when thy Father must lie down and die
How wilt thou stand alone?

Idon.

Is he not strong?

Is he not valiant?

Her.

Am I then so soon

Forgotten? have my warnings passed so quickly
Out of thy mind? My dear, my only, Child;
Thou wouldst be leaning on a broken reed —
This Marmaduke ——

THE BORDERERS

Idon.

O could you hear his voice:

Alas! you do not know him. He is one
(I wot not what ill tongue has wronged him with you)
All gentleness and love. His face bespeaks
A deep and simple meekness: and that Soul,
Which with the motion of a virtuous act
Flashes a look of terror upon guilt,
Is, after conflict, quiet as the ocean,
By a miraculous finger, stilled at once.

Her. Unhappy Woman!

Idon.

Nay, it was my duty

Thus much to speak; but think not I forget —
Dear Father! how *could* I forget and live —
You and the story of that doleful night
When, Antioch blazing to her topmost towers,
You rushed into the murderous flames, returned
Blind as the grave, but, as you oft have told me,
Clasping your infant Daughter to your heart.

Her. Thy Mother too! — scarce had I gained the
door,

I caught her voice; she threw herself upon me,
I felt thy infant brother in her arms;
She saw my blasted face — a tide of soldiers
That instant rushed between us, and I heard
Her last death-shriek, distinct among a thousand.

Idon. Nay, Father, stop not; let me hear it all.

THE BORDERERS

Her. Dear Daughter! precious relic of that
time —

For my old age, it doth remain with thee
To make it what thou wilt. Thou hast been told,
That when, on our return from Palestine,
I found how my domains had been usurped,
I took thee in my arms, and we began
Our wanderings together. Providence
At length conducted us to Rossland, — there,
Our melancholy story moved a Stranger
To take thee to her home — and for myself,
Soon after, the good Abbot of St. Cuthbert's
Supplied my helplessness with food and raiment,
And, as thou know'st, gave me that humble Cot
Where now we dwell. — For many years I bore
Thy absence, till old age and fresh infirmities
Exacted thy return, and our reunion.
I did not think that, during that long absence,
My Child, forgetful of the name of Herbert,
Had given her love to a wild Freebooter,
Who here, upon the borders of the Tweed,
Doth prey alike on two distracted Countries,
Traitor to both.

Idon. Oh, could you hear his voice!
I will not call on Heaven to vouch for me,
But let this kiss speak what is in my heart.

THE BORDERERS

Enter a PEASANT

Pea. Good morrow, Strangers! If you want a Guide,
Let me have leave to serve you!

Idon. My Companion
Hath need of rest; the sight of Hut or Hostel
Would be most welcome.

Pea. Yon white hawthorn gained,
You will look down into a dell, and there
Will see an ash from which a sign-board hangs;
The house is hidden by the shade. Old Man,
You seem worn out with travel — shall I support
you?

Her. I thank you; but, a resting-place so near,
'T were wrong to trouble you.

Pea. God speed you both.
[*Exit Peasant.*

Her. Idonea, we must part. Be not alarmed —
'T is but for a few days — a thought has struck me.

Idon. That I should leave you at this house, and
thence
Proceed alone. It shall be so; for strength
Would fail you ere our journey's end be reached.

[*Exit Herbert supported by Idonea.*

Re-enter MARMADUKE and OSWALD

Mar. This instant will we stop him ——

Osw. Be not hasty,

THE BORDERERS

For, sometimes, in despite of my conviction,
He tempted me to think the Story true;
'T is plain he loves the Maid, and what he said
That savoured of aversion to thy name
Appeared the genuine colour of his soul —
Anxiety lest mischief should befall her
After his death.

Mar. I have been much deceived.

Osw. But sure he loves the Maiden, and never love
Could find delight to nurse itself so strangely,
Thus to torment her with *inventions*! — death —
There must be truth in this.

Mar. Truth in his story!
He must have felt it then, known what it was,
And in such wise to rack her gentle heart
Had been a tenfold cruelty.

Osw. Strange pleasures
Do we poor mortals cater for ourselves!
To see him thus provoke her tenderness
With tales of weakness and infirmity!
I'd wager on his life for twenty years.

Mar. We will not waste an hour in such a cause.

Osw. Why, this is noble! shake her off at once.

Mar. Her virtues are his instruments. — A Man
Who has so practised on the world's cold sense,
May well deceive his Child — what! leave her thus,

THE BORDERERS

A prey to a deceiver? — no — no — no —

'Tis but a word and then ——

Osw.

Something is here

More than we see, or whence this strong aversion?

Marmaduke! I suspect unworthy tales

Have reached his ear — you have had enemies.

Mar. Enemies! — of his own coinage.

Osw.

That may be,

But wherefore slight protection such as you

Have power to yield? perhaps he looks elsewhere, —

I am perplexed.

Mar.

What hast thou heard or seen?

Osw. No — no — the thing stands clear of mystery;

(As you have said) he coins himself the slander

With which he taints her ear; — for a plain reason;

He dreads the presence of a virtuous man

Like you; he knows your eye would search his heart,

Your justice stamp upon his evil deeds

The punishment they merit. All is plain:

It cannot be ——

Mar.

What cannot be?

Osw.

Yet that a Father

Should in his love admit no rivalry,

And torture thus the heart of his own Child ——

Mar. Nay, you abuse my friendship!

THE BORDERERS

Osw.

Heaven forbid! —

There was a circumstance, trifling indeed —
It struck me at the time — yet I believe
I never should have thought of it again
But for the scene which we by chance have witnessed.

Mar. What is your meaning?

Osw.

Two days gone I saw,

Though at a distance and he was disguised,
Hovering round Herbert's door, a man whose figure
Resembled much that cold voluptuary,
The villain, Clifford. He hates you, and he knows
Where he can stab you deepest.

Mar.

Clifford never

Would stoop to skulk about a Cottage door —
It could not be.

Osw.

And yet I now remember,

That, when your praise was warm upon my tongue,
And the blind Man was told how you had rescued
A maiden from the ruffian violence
Of this same Clifford, he became impatient
And would not hear me.

Mar.

No — it cannot be —

I dare not trust myself with such a thought —
Yet whence this strange aversion? You are a man
Not used to rash conjectures ———

Osw.

If you deem it

THE BORDERERS

A thing worth further notice, we must act
With caution, sift the matter artfully.

[*Exeunt Marmaduke and Oswald.*]

SCENE — *The Door of the Hostel*

HERBERT, IDONEA, and HOST

Her. (*seated*). As I am dear to you, remember, Child!
This last request.

Idon. You know me, Sire; farewell!

Her. And are you going then? Come, come, Idonea,
We must not part, — I have measured many a league
When these old limbs had need of rest, — and now
I will not play the sluggard.

Idon. Nay, sit down.

[*Turning to Host.*]

Good Host, such tendance as you would expect
From your own Children, if yourself were sick,
Let this old Man find at your hands; poor Leader,

[*Looking at the dog.*]

We soon shall meet again. If thou neglect
This charge of thine, then ill befall thee! — Look,
The little fool is loth to stay behind.

Sir Host! by all the love you bear to courtesy,
Take care of him, and feed the truant well.

Host. Fear not, I will obey you; — but One so young,
And One so fair, it goes against my heart

THE BORDERERS

That you should travel unattended, Lady! —
I have a palfrey and a groom: the lad
Shall squire you, (would it not be better, Sir?)
And for less fee than I would let him run
For any lady I have seen this twelvemonth.

Idon. You know, Sir, I have been too long your guard
Not to have learnt to laugh at little fears.
Why, if a wolf should leap from out a thicket,
A look of mine would send him scouring back,
Unless I differ from the thing I am
When you are by my side.

Her. *Idonea, wolves*
Are not the enemies that move my fears.

Idon. No more, I pray, of this. Three days at farthest
Will bring me back — protect him, Saints — farewell!
[Exit Idonea.]

Host. 'T is never drought with us — St. Cuthbert and
his Pilgrims,
Thanks to them, are to us a stream of comfort:
Pity the Maiden did not wait awhile;
She could not, Sir, have failed of company.

Her. Now she is gone, I fain would call her back.

Host (calling). Holla!

Her. No, no, the business must be done. —
What means this riotous noise?

Host. The villagers

THE BORDERERS

Are flocking in — a wedding festival —
That's all — God save you, Sir.

Enter OSWALD

Osw. Ha! as I live,
The Baron Herbert.

Host. Mercy, the Baron Herbert!

Osw. So far into your journey! on my life,
You are a lusty Traveller. But how fare you?

Her. Well as the wreck I am permits. And you, Sir?

Osw. I do not see Idonea.

Her. Dutiful Girl,
She is gone before, to spare my weariness.
But what has brought you hither?

Osw. A slight affair,
That will be soon despatched.

Her. Did Marmaduke
Receive that letter?

Osw. Be at peace. — The tie
Is broken, you will hear no more of *him*.

Her. This is true comfort, thanks a thousand times! —
That noise! — would I had gone with her as far
As the Lord Clifford's Castle: I have heard
That, in his milder moods, he has expressed
Compassion for me. His influence is great
With Henry, our good King; — the Baron might
Have heard my suit, and urged my plea at Court.

THE BORDERERS

No matter — he's a dangerous Man. — That noise! — 'T is too disorderly for sleep or rest.

Idonea would have fears for me, — the Convent
Will give me quiet lodging. You have a boy, good Host,
And he must lead me back.

Osw.

You are most lucky;

I have been waiting in the wood hard by
For a companion — here he comes; our journey

Enter MARMADUKE.

Lies on your way; accept us as your Guides.

Her. Alas! I creep so slowly.

Osw.

Never fear;

We'll not complain of that.

Her.

My limbs are stiff

And need repose. Could you but wait an hour?

Osw. Most willingly! — Come, let me lead you in,
And, while you take your rest, think not of us;
We'll stroll into the wood; lean on my arm.

[*Conducts Herbert into the house. Exit Marmaduke.*]

Enter Villagers

Osw. (to himself coming out of the Hostel). I have prepared a most apt Instrument —

The Vagrant must, no doubt, be loitering somewhere
About this ground; she hath a tongue well skilled,
By mingling natural matter of her own

THE BORDERERS

With all the daring fictions I have taught her,
To win belief, such as my plot requires. [*Exit Oswald.*]

Enter more Villagers, a Musician among them

Host (to them). Into the court, my Friend, and perch
yourself

Aloft upon the elm-tree. Pretty Maids,
Garlands and flowers, and cakes and merry thoughts,
Are here, to send the sun into the west
More speedily than you belike would wish.

SCENE changes to the Wood adjoining the Hostel

MARMADUKE and OSWALD entering

Mar. I would fain hope that we deceive ourselves:
When first I saw him sitting there, alone,
It struck upon my heart I know not how.

Osw. To-day will clear up all. — You marked a Cot-
tage,

That ragged Dwelling, close beneath a rock
By the brook-side: it is the abode of One,
A Maiden innocent till ensnared by Clifford,
Who soon grew weary of her; but, alas!
What she had seen and suffered turned her brain.
Cast off by her Betrayer, she dwells alone,
Nor moves her hands to any needful work:
She eats her food which every day the peasants
Bring to her hut; and so the Wretch has lived

THE BORDERERS

Ten years; and no one ever heard her voice;
But every night at the first stroke of twelve
She quits her house, and, in the neighbouring Church-
yard

Upon the self-same spot, in rain or storm,
She paces out the hour 'twixt twelve and one —
She paces round and round an Infant's grave,
And in the churchyard sod her feet have worn
A hollow ring; they say it is knee-deep ——
Ah! what is here?

[A female Beggar rises up, rubbing her eyes as if in sleep — a Child in her arms.]

Beg. Oh! Gentlemen, I thank you;
I've had the saddest dream that ever troubled
The heart of living creature. — My poor Babe
Was crying, as I thought, crying for bread
When I had none to give him; whereupon,
I put a slip of foxglove in his hand,
Which pleased him so, that he was hushed at once:
When, into one of those same spotted bells
A bee came darting, which the Child with joy
Imprisoned there, and held it to his ear,
And suddenly grew black, as he would die.

Mar. We have no time for this, my babbling Gossip;
Here's what will comfort you. *[Gives her money.]*

Beg. The Saints reward you

THE BORDERERS

For this good deed! — Well, Sirs, this passed away;
And afterwards I fancied, a strange dog,
Trotting alone along the beaten road,
Came to my child as by my side he slept
And, fondling, licked his face, then on a sudden
Snapped fierce to make a morsel of his head:
But here he is, (*kissing the Child*) it must have been
a dream.

Osw. When next inclined to sleep, take my advice,
And put your head, good Woman, under cover.

Beg. Oh, Sir, you would not talk thus, if you knew
What life is this of ours, how sleep will master
The weary-worn. — You gentlefolk have got
Warm chambers to your wish. I'd rather be
A stone than what I am. — But two nights gone,
The darkness overtook me — wind and rain
Beat hard upon my head — and yet I saw
A glow-worm, through the covert of the furze,
Shine calmly as if nothing ailed the sky:
At which I half accused the God in Heaven. —
You must forgive me.

Osw. Ay, and if you think
The Fairies are to blame, and you should chide
Your favourite saint — no matter — this good day
Has made amends.

Beg. Thanks to you both; but, O Sir!

THE BORDERERS

How would you like to travel on whole hours
As I have done, my eyes upon the ground,
Expecting still, I knew not how, to find
A piece of money glittering through the dust.

Mar. This woman is a prater. Pray, good Lady!
Do you tell fortunes?

Beg. Oh, Sir, you are like the rest.
This Little-one — it cuts me to the heart —
Well! they might turn a beggar from their doors,
But there are Mothers who can see the Babe
Here at my breast, and ask me where I bought it:
This they can do, and look upon my face —
But you, Sir, should be kinder.

Mar. Come hither, Fathers,
And learn what Nature is from this poor Wretch!

Beg. Ay, Sir, there's nobody that feels for us.
Why now — but yesterday I overtook
A blind old Greybeard and accosted him,
I' th' name of all the Saints, and by the Mass
He should have used me better! — Charity!
If you can melt a rock, he is your man;
But I'll be even with him — here again
Have I been waiting for him.

Osw. Well, but softly,
Who is it that hath wronged you?

Beg. Mark you me;

THE BORDERERS

I'll point him out; — a Maiden is his guide,
Lovely as Spring's first rose; a little dog,
Tied by a woollen cord, moves on before
With look as sad as he were dumb; the cur,
I owe him no ill will, but in good sooth
He does his Master credit.

Mar.

As I live,

'T is Herbert and no other!

Beg.

'T is a feast to see him,

Lank as a ghost and tall, his shoulders bent,
And long beard white with age — yet evermore,
As if he were the only Saint on earth,
He turns his face to heaven.

Osw.

But why so violent

Against this venerable Man?

Beg.

I'll tell you:

He has the very hardest heart on earth;
I had as lief turn to the Friars' school
And knock for entrance, in mid holiday.

Mar. But to your story.

Beg.

I was saying, Sir —

Well! — he has often spurned me like a toad,
But yesterday was worse than all; — at last
I overtook him, Sirs, my Babe and I,
And begged a little aid for charity:
But he was snappish as a cottage cur.

THE BORDERERS

Well then, says I — I'll out with it; at which
I cast a look upon the Girl, and felt
As if my heart would burst; and so I left him.

Osw. I think, good Woman, you are the very person

Whom, but some few days past, I saw in Eskdale,
At Herbert's door.

Beg. Ay; and if truth were known
I have good business there.

Osw. I met you at the threshold,
And he seemed angry.

Beg. Angry! well he might;
And long as I can stir I'll dog him. — Yesterday,
To serve me so, and knowing that he owes
The best of all he has to me and mine.
But 't is all over now. — That good old Lady
Has left a power of riches; and, I say it,
If there's a lawyer in the land, the knave
Shall give me half.

Osw. What's this? — I fear, good Woman,
You have been insolent.

Beg. And there's the Baron,
I spied him skulking in his peasant's dress.

Osw. How say you? in disguise? —

Mar. But what's your business
With Herbert or his Daughter?

THE BORDERERS

Beg. Daughter! truly —
But how's the day? — I fear, my little Boy,
We've overslept ourselves. — Sirs, have you seen him?
[*Offers to go.*]

Mar. I must have more of this; — you shall not
stir
An inch, till I am answered. Know you aught
That doth concern this Herbert?

Beg. You are provoked,
And will misuse me, Sir?

Mar. No trifling, Woman!

Osw. You are as safe as in a sanctuary;
Speak.

Mar. Speak!

Beg. He is a most hard-hearted Man.

Mar. Your life is at my mercy.

Beg. Do not harm me,
And I will tell you all! — You know not, Sir,
What strong temptations press upon the Poor.

Osw. Speak out.

Beg. Oh, Sir, I've been a wicked Woman.

Osw. Nay, but speak out!

Beg. He flattered me, and said
What harvest it would bring us both; and so,
I parted with the Child.

Mar. Parted with whom?

THE BORDERERS

Beg. Idonea, as he calls her; but the Girl
Is mine.

Mar. Yours, Woman! are you Herbert's wife?

Beg. Wife, Sir! his wife — not I; my husband, Sir,
Was of Kirkoswald — many a snowy winter
We've weathered out together. My poor Gilfred!
He has been two years in his grave.

Mar. Enough.

Osw. We've solved the riddle — Miscreant!

Mar. Do you,
Good Dame, repair to Liddesdale and wait
For my return; be sure you shall have justice.

Osw. A lucky woman! go, you have done good service.
[*Aside.*

Mar. (*to himself*). Eternal praises on the power that
saved her! —

Osw. (*gives her money*). Here's for your little boy —
and when you christen him
I'll be his Godfather.

Beg. Oh, Sir, you are merry with me.
In grange or farm this Hundred scarcely owns
A dog that does not know me. — These good Folks,
For love of God, I must not pass their doors;
But I'll be back with my best speed: for you —
God bless and thank you both, my gentle Masters.

[*Exit Beggar.*

THE BORDERERS

Mar. (*to himself*). The cruel Viper! — Poor devoted Maid,

Now I *do* love thee.

Osw. I am thunderstruck.

Mar. Where is she — holla!

[*Calling to the Beggar, who returns; he looks at her stedfastly.*

You are Idonea's mother?—

Nay, be not terrified — it does me good

To look upon you.

Osw. (*interrupting*). In a peasant's dress
You saw, who was it?

Beg. Nay, I dare not speak;
He is a man, if it should come to his ears
I never shall be heard of more.

Osw. Lord Clifford?

Beg. What can I do? believe me, gentle Sirs,
I love her, though I dare not call her daughter.

Osw. Lord Clifford — did you see him talk with Herbert?

Beg. Yes, to my sorrow — under the great oak
At Herbert's door — and when he stood beside
The blind Man — at the silent Girl he looked
With such a look — it makes me tremble, Sir,
To think of it.

Osw. Enough! you may depart.

THE BORDERERS

Mar. (to himself). Father!— to God himself
we cannot give

A holier name; and, under such a mask,
To lead a Spirit, spotless as the blessed,
To that abhorrèd den of brutish vice! —
Oswald, the firm foundation of my life
Is going from under me; these strange discoveries —
Looked at from every point of fear or hope,
Duty, or love — involve, I feel, my ruin.

THE BORDERERS

ACT II

SCENE — *A Chamber in the Hostel*

OSWALD *alone, rising from a Table on which he had
been writing*

Osw. They chose *him* for their Chief! — what covert
part

He, in the preference, modest Youth, might take.
I neither know nor care. The insult bred
More of contempt than hatred; both are flown;
That either e'er existed is my shame:
'T was a dull spark — a most unnatural fire
That died the moment the air breathed upon it.
— These fools of feeling are mere birds of winter
That haunt some barren island of the north,
Where, if a famishing man stretch forth his hand,
They think it is to feed them. I have left him
To solitary meditation; — now
For a few swelling phrases, and a flash
Of truth, enough to dazzle and to blind,
And he is mine for ever — here he comes.

Enter MARMADUKE

Mar. These ten years she has moved her lips all day
And never speaks!

Osw. Who is it?

THE BORDERERS

Mar. I have seen her.

Osw. Oh! the poor tenant of that ragged homestead,
Her whom the Monster, Clifford, drove to madness.

Mar. I met a peasant near the spot; he told me,
These ten years she had sate all day alone
Within those empty walls.

Osw. I too have seen her;
Chancing to pass this way some six months gone,
At midnight, I betook me to the Churchyard:
The moon shone clear, the air was still, so still
The trees were silent as the graves beneath them.
Long did I watch, and saw her pacing round
Upon the self-same spot, still round and round,
Her lips for ever moving.

Mar. At her door
Rooted I stood; for, looking at the woman,
I thought I saw the skeleton of Idonea.

Osw. But the pretended Father ——

Mar. Earthly law
Measures not crimes like his.

Osw. We rank not, happily,
With those who take the spirit of their rule
From that soft class of devotees who feel
Reverence for life so deeply, that they spare
The verminous brood, and cherish what they spare
While feeding on their bodies. Would that Idonea

THE BORDERERS

Were present, to the end that we might hear
What she can urge in his defence; she loves him.

Mar. Yes, loves him; 't is a truth that multiplies
His guilt a thousand-fold.

Osw. 'T is most perplexing:
What must be done?

Mar. We will conduct her hither;
These walls shall witness it — from first to last
He shall reveal himself.

Osw. Happy are we,
Who live in these disputed tracts, that own
No law but what each man makes for himself;
Here justice has indeed a field of triumph.

Mar. Let us be gone and bring her hither; — here
The truth shall be laid open, his guilt proved
Before her face. The rest be left to me.

Osw. You will be firm: but though we well may trust
The issue to the justice of the cause,
Caution must not be flung aside; remember,
Yours is no common life. Self-stationed here
Upon these savage confines, we have seen you
Stand like an isthmus 'twixt two stormy seas
That oft have checked their fury at your bidding.
Mid the deep holds of Solway's mossy waste,
Your single virtue has transformed a Band
Of fierce barbarians into Ministers

THE BORDERERS

Of peace and order. Aged men with tears
Have blessed their steps, the fatherless retire
For shelter to their banners. But it is,
As you must needs have deeply felt, it is
In darkness and in tempest that we seek
The majesty of Him who rules the world.
Benevolence, that has not heart to use
The wholesome ministry of pain and evil,
Becomes at last weak and contemptible.
Your generous qualities have won due praise,
But vigorous Spirits look for something more
Than Youth's spontaneous products; and to-day
You will not disappoint them; and hereafter ——

Mar. You are wasting words; hear me then, once
for all:

You are a Man — and therefore, if compassion,
Which to our kind is natural as life,
Be known unto you, you will love this Woman,
Even as I do; but I should loathe the light,
If I could think one weak or partial feeling ——

Osw. You will forgive me ——

Mar. If I ever knew

My heart, could penetrate its inmost core,
'T is at this moment. — Oswald, I have loved
To be the friend and father of the oppressed,
A comforter of sorrow; — there is something

THE BORDERERS

Which looks like a transition in my soul,
And yet it is not. — Let us lead him hither.

Osw. Stoop for a moment; 't is an act of justice;
And where's the triumph if the delegate
Must fall in the execution of his office?
The deed is done — if you will have it so —
Here where we stand — that tribe of vulgar wretches
(You saw them gathering for the festival)
Rush in — the villains seize us ——

Mar. Seize!

Osw. Yes, they —
Men who are little given to sift and weigh —
Would wreak on us the passion of the moment.

Mar. The cloud will soon disperse — farewell — but
stay,

Thou wilt relate the story.

Osw. Am I neither
To bear a part in this Man's punishment,
Nor be its witness?

Mar. I had many hopes
That were most dear to me, and some will bear
To be transferred to thee.

Osw. When I'm dishonoured!

Mar. I would preserve thee. How may this be done?

Osw. By showing that you look beyond the instant.
A few leagues hence we shall have open ground,

THE BORDERERS

And nowhere upon earth is place so fit
To look upon the deed. Before we enter
The barren Moor, hangs from a beetling rock
The shattered Castle in which Clifford oft
Has held infernal orgies — with the gloom,
And very superstition of the place,
Seasoning his wickedness. The Debauchee
Would there perhaps have gathered the first fruits
Of this mock Father's guilt.

Enter HOST *conducting* HERBERT

Host. The Baron Herbert
Attends your pleasure.

Osw. (to Host). We are ready —
(To Herbert) Sir!

I hope you are refreshed. — I have just written
A notice for your Daughter, that she may know
What is become of you. — You'll sit down and sign it;
'T will glad her heart to see her father's signature.

[Gives the letter he had written.

Her. Thanks for your care.

[Sits down and writes. Exit Host.]

Osw. (*aside to Marmaduke*). Perhaps it would be
useful

That you too should subscribe your name.

[Marmaduke *overlooks* Herbert — *then writes*
— *examines the letter eagerly.*

THE BORDERERS

Mar. I cannot leave this paper.

[*He puts it up, agitated.*]

Osw. (aside).

Dastard! Come.

[*Marmaduke goes towards Herbert and supports him — Marmaduke tremblingly beckons Oswald to take his place.*]

Mar. (as he quits Herbert). There is a palsy in his limbs — he shakes.

[*Exeunt Oswald and Herbert — Marmaduke following.*]

SCENE *changes to a Wood*

A group of Pilgrims, IDONEA with them

First Pil. A grove of darker and more lofty shade
I never saw.

Second Pil. The music of the birds
Drops deadened from a roof so thick with leaves.

Old Pil. This news! It made my heart leap up with joy.

Idon. I scarcely can believe it.

Old Pil.

Myself, I heard

The Sheriff read, in open Court, a letter
Which purported it was the royal pleasure
The Baron Herbert, who, as was supposed,
Had taken refuge in this neighbourhood,
Should be forthwith restored. The hearing, Lady,
Filled my dim eyes with tears. — When I returned
From Palestine, and brought with me a heart,

THE BORDERERS

Though rich in heavenly, poor in earthly, comfort,
I met your Father, then a wandering Outcast:
He had a Guide, a Shepherd's boy; but grieved
He was that One so young should pass his youth
In such sad service; and he parted with him.
We joined our tales of wretchedness together,
And begged our daily bread from door to door.
I talk familiarly to you, sweet Lady!
For once you loved me.

Idon. You shall back with me
And see your Friend again. The good old Man
Will be rejoiced to greet you.

Old Pil. It seems but yesterday
That a fierce storm o'ertook us, worn with travel,
In a deep wood remote from any town.
A cave that opened to the road presented
A friendly shelter, and we entered in.

Idon. And I was with you?

Old Pil. If indeed 't was you —
But you were then a tottering Little-one —
We sate us down. The sky grew dark and darker:
I struck my flint, and built up a small fire
With rotten boughs and leaves, such as the winds
Of many autumns in the cave had piled.
Meanwhile the storm fell heavy on the woods;
Our little fire sent forth a cheering warmth

THE BORDERERS

And we were comforted, and talked of comfort;
But 't was an angry night, and o'er our heads
The thunder rolled in peals that would have made
A sleeping man uneasy in his bed.

O Lady, you have need to love your Father.
His voice — methinks I hear it now, his voice
When, after a broad flash that filled the cave,
He said to me, that he had seen his Child,
A face (no cherub's face more beautiful)
Revealed by lustre brought with it from Heaven;
And it was you, dear Lady!

Idon.

God be praised,

That I have been his comforter till now!
And will be so through every change of fortune
And every sacrifice his peace requires. —
Let us be gone with speed, that he may hear
These joyful tidings from no lips but mine.

[*Exeunt Idonea and Pilgrims.*]

SCENE — *The Area of a half-ruined Castle — on one side
the entrance to a dungeon*

OSWALD and MARMADUKE *pacing backwards and
forwards*

Mar. 'T is a wild night.

Osw. I'd give my cloak and bonnet
For sight of a warm fire.

THE BORDERERS

Mar. The wind blows keen;
My hands are numb.

Osw. Ha! ha! 't is nipping cold.

[*Blowing his fingers.*]

I long for news of our brave Comrades; Lacy
Would drive those Scottish Rovers to their dens
If once they blew a horn this side the Tweed.

Mar. I think I see a second range of Towers;
This castle has another Area — come,
Let us examine it.

Osw. 'T is a bitter night;
I hope Idonea is well housed. That horseman,
Who at full speed swept by us where the wood
Roared in the tempest, was within an ace
Of sending to his grave our precious Charge:
That would have been a vile mischance.

Mar. It would.

Osw. Justice had been most cruelly defrauded.

Mar. Most cruelly.

Osw. As up the steep we clomb,
I saw a distant fire in the north-east;
I took it for the blaze of Cheviot Beacon:
With proper speed our quarters may be gained
To-morrow evening.

[Looks restlessly towards the mouth of the dungeon.

Mar. When, upon the plank,

THE BORDERERS

I had led him 'cross the torrent, his voice blessed me:
You could not hear, for the foam beat the rocks
With deafening noise, — the benediction fell
Back on himself; but changed into a curse.

Osw. As well indeed it might.

Mar. And this you deem

The fittest place?

Osw. (aside). He is growing pitiful.

Mar. (listening). What an odd moaning that is! —

Osw. Mighty odd

The wind should pipe a little, while we stand
Cooling our heels in this way! — I 'll begin
And count the stars.

Mar. (still listening). That dog of his, you are sure,
Could not come after us — he *must* have perished;
The torrent would have dashed an oak to splinters.
You said you did not like his looks — that he
Would trouble us; if he were here again,
I swear the sight of him would quail me more
Than twenty armies.

Osw. How?

Mar. The old blind Man,
When you had told him the mischance, was troubled
Even to the shedding of some natural tears
Into the torrent over which he hung,
Listening in vain.

THE BORDERERS

Osw. He has a tender heart!

[*Oswald offers to go down into the dungeon.*]

Mar. How now, what mean you?

Osw. Truly, I was going

To waken our stray Baron. Were there not
A farm or dwelling-house within five leagues,
We should deserve to wear a cap and bells,
Three good round years, for playing the fool here
In such a night as this.

Mar. Stop, stop.

Osw. Perhaps,

You'd better like we should descend together,
And lie down by his side — what say you to it?
Three of us — we should keep each other warm:
I'll answer for it that our four-legged friend
Shall not disturb us; further I'll not engage;
Come, come, for manhood's sake!

Mar. These drowsy shiverings,

This mortal stupor which is creeping over me,
What do they mean? were this my single body
Opposed to armies, not a nerve would tremble:
Why do I tremble now? — Is not the depth
Of this Man's crimes beyond the reach of thought?
And yet, in plumbing the abyss for judgment,
Something I strike upon which turns my mind
Back on herself, I think, again — my breast

THE BORDERERS

Concentres all the terrors of the Universe:

I look at him and tremble like a child.

Osw. Is it possible?

Mar. One thing you noticed not:

Just as we left the glen a clap of thunder

Burst on the mountains with hell-rousing force.

This is a time, said he, when guilt may shudder;

But there's a Providence for them who walk

In helplessness, when innocence is with them.

At this audacious blasphemy, I thought

The spirit of vengeance seemed to ride the air.

Osw. Why are you not the man you were that moment?

[*He draws Marmaduke to the dungeon.*]

Mar. You say he was asleep, — look at this arm,
And tell me if 't is fit for such a work.

Oswald, Oswald! [*Leans upon Oswald.*]

Osw. This is some sudden seizure!

Mar. A most strange faintness, — will you hunt me
out

A draught of water?

Osw. Nay, to see you thus
Moves me beyond my bearing. — I will try
To gain the torrent's brink.

[*Exit Oswald.*]

Mar. (*after a pause*). It seems an age
Since that Man left me. — No, I am not lost.

THE BORDERERS

Her. (*at the mouth of the dungeon*). Give me your hand;
where are you, Friends? and tell me
How goes the night.

Mar. 'T is hard to measure time,
In such a weary night, and such a place.

Her. I do not hear the voice of my friend Oswald.

Mar. A minute past, he went to fetch a draught
Of water from the torrent. 'T is, you'll say,
A cheerless beverage.

Her. How good it was in you
To stay behind! — Hearing at first no answer,
I was alarmed.

Mar. No wonder; this is a place
That well may put some fears into *your* heart.

Her. Why so? a roofless rock had been a comfort,
Storm-beaten and bewildered as we were;
And in a night like this, to lend your cloaks
To make a bed for me! — My Girl will weep
When she is told of it.

Mar. This Daughter of yours
Is very dear to you.

Her. Oh! but you are young;
Over your head twice twenty years must roll,
With all their natural weight of sorrow and pain,
Ere can be known to you how much a Father
May love his Child.

THE BORDERERS

Mar. Thank you, old Man, for this! [*Aside.*

Her. Fallen am I, and worn out, a useless Man;
Kindly have you protected me to-night,
And no return have I to make but prayers;
May you in age be blest with such a daughter! —
When from the Holy Land I had returned
Sightless, and from my heritage was driven,
A wretched Outcast — but this strain of thought
Would lead me to talk fondly.

Mar. Do not fear;
Your words are precious to my ears; go on.

Her. You will forgive me, but my heart runs over.
When my old Leader slipped into the flood
And perished, what a piercing outcry you
Sent after him. I have loved you ever since.
You start — where are we?

Mar. Oh, there is no danger;
The cold blast struck me.

Her. 'T was a foolish question.

Mar. But when you were an Outcast? — Heaven
is just;
Your piety would not miss its due reward;
The little Orphan then would be your succour,
And do good service, though she knew it not.

Her. I turned me from the dwellings of my Fathers,
Where none but those who trampled on my rights

THE BORDERERS

Seemed to remember me. To the wide world
I bore her, in my arms; her looks won pity;
She was my Raven in the wilderness,
And brought me food. Have I not cause to love her?

Mar. Yes.

Her. More than ever Parent loved a Child?

Mar. Yes, yes.

Her. I will not murmur, merciful God!
I will not murmur; blasted as I have been,
Thou hast left me ears to hear my Daughter's voice,
And arms to fold her to my heart. Submissively
Thee I adore, and find my rest in faith.

Enter OSWALD

Osw. Herbert! — confusion! (*Aside.*) Here it is, my
Friend, [*Presents the Horn.*

A charming beverage for you to carouse,
This bitter night.

Her. Ha! Oswald! ten bright crosses
I would have given, not many minutes gone,
To have heard your voice.

Osw. Your couch, I fear, good Baron,
Has been but comfortless; and yet that place,
When the tempestuous wind first drove us hither,
Felt warm as a wren's nest. You'd better turn
And under covert rest till break of day,
Or till the storm abate.

THE BORDERERS

(*To Marmaduke aside.*) He has restored you.
No doubt you have been nobly entertained?
But soft! — how came he forth? The Night-mare Con-
science

Has driven him out of harbour?

Mar. I believe

You have guessed right.

Her. The trees renew their murmur:
Come, let us house together.

[*Oswald conducts him to the dungeon.*]

Osw. (returns). Had I not
Esteemed you worthy to conduct the affair
To its most fit conclusion, do you think
I would so long have struggled with my nature,
And smothered all that's man in me? — away! —

[*Looking towards the dungeon.*]

This man's the property of him who best
Can feel his crimes. I have resigned a privilege;
It now becomes my duty to resume it.

Mar. Touch not a finger —

Osw. What then must be done?

Mar. Which way soe'er I turn, I am perplexed.

Osw. Now, on my life, I grieve for you. The mis-
ery

Of doubt is insupportable. Pity, the facts
Did not admit of stronger evidence;

THE BORDERERS

Twelve honest men, plain men, would set us right;
Their verdict would abolish these weak scruples.

Mar. Weak! I am weak — there does my torment
lie,
Feeding itself.

Osw. Verily, when he said
How his old heart would leap to hear her steps,
You thought his voice the echo of Idonea's.

Mar. And never heard a sound so terrible.

Osw. Perchance you think so now?

Mar. I cannot do it:
Twice did I spring to grasp his withered throat,
When such a sudden weakness fell upon me,
I could have dropped asleep upon his breast.

Osw. Justice — is there not thunder in the word?
Shall it be law to stab the petty robber
Who aims but at our purse; and shall this Parricide —
Worse is he far, far worse (if foul dishonour
Be worse than death) to that confiding Creature
Whom he to more than filial love and duty
Hath falsely trained — shall he fulfil his purpose?
But you are fallen.

Mar. Fallen should I be indeed —
Murder — perhaps asleep, blind, old, alone,
Betrayed, in darkness! Here to strike the blow —
Away! away! —— *[Flings away his sword.]*

THE BORDERERS

Osw.

Nay, I have done with you:

We'll lead him to the Convent. He shall live,
And she shall love him. With unquestioned title
He shall be seated in his Barony,
And we too chant the praise of his good deeds.
I now perceive we do mistake our masters,
And most despise the men who best can teach us:
Henceforth it shall be said that bad men only
Are brave: Clifford is brave; and that old Man
Is brave.

[*Taking Marmaduke's sword and giving it to him.*

To Clifford's arms he would have led
His Victim — haply to this desolate house.

Mar. (*advancing to the dungeon*). It must be ended! —

Osw.

Softly; do not rouse him;

He will deny it to the last. He lies

Within the Vault, a spear's length to the left.

[*Marmaduke descends to the dungeon.*

(*Alone.*) The Villains rose in mutiny to destroy me;
I could have quelled the Cowards, but this Stripling
Must needs step in, and save my life. The look
With which he gave the boon — I see it now!
The same that tempted me to loathe the gift. —
For this old venerable Greybeard — faith
'T is his own fault if he hath got a face
Which doth play tricks with them that look on it:

THE BORDERERS

'T was this that put it in my thoughts — that countenance —

His staff — his figure — Murder! — what, of whom?
We kill a worn-out horse, and who but women
Sigh at the deed? Hew down a withered tree,
And none look grave but dotards. He may live
To thank me for this service. Rainbow arches,
Highways of dreaming passion, have too long,
Young as he is, diverted wish and hope
From the unpretending ground we mortals tread; —
Then shatter the delusion, break it up
And set him free. What follows? I have learned
That things will work to ends the slaves o' the world
Do never dream of. I *have* been what he —
This Boy — when he comes forth with bloody hands —
Might envy, and am now, — but he shall know
What I am now —

[Goes and listens at the dungeon.]

Praying or parleying? — tut!

Is he not eyeless? He has been half-dead

These fifteen years —

*Enter female Beggar with two or three of her
Companions*

(Turning abruptly.) Ha! speak — what Thing art thou?

(Recognises her.) Heavens! my good Friend! [To her.]

Beg.

Forgive me, gracious Sir! —

THE BORDERERS

Osw. (to her companions). Begone, ye Slaves, or I will
raise a whirlwind
And send ye dancing to the clouds, like leaves.

[*They retire affrighted.*]

Beg. Indeed we meant no harm; we lodge sometimes
In this deserted Castle — *I repent me.*

[*Oswald goes to the dungeon — listens — returns
to the Beggar.*]

Osw. Woman, thou hast a helpless Infant — keep
Thy secret for its sake, or verily
That wretched life of thine shall be the forfeit.

Beg. I do repent me, Sir; I fear the curse
Of that blind Man. 'T was not your money, Sir ——

Osw. Begone!

Beg. (*going*). There is some wicked deed in hand:
[*Aside.*]

Would I could find the old Man and his Daughter.

[*Exit Beggar.*]

MARMADUKE (*re-enters from the dungeon*)

Osw. It is all over then; — your foolish fears
Are hushed to sleep, by your own act and deed,
Made quiet as he is.

Mar. Why came you down?
And when I felt your hand upon my arm
And spake to you, why did you give no answer?
Feared you to waken him? he must have been

THE BORDERERS

In a deep sleep. I whispered to him thrice.

There are the strangest echoes in that place!

Osw. Tut! let them gabble till the day of doom.

Mar. Scarcely, by groping, had I reached the Spot,
When round my wrist I felt a cord drawn tight,
As if the blind Man's dog were pulling at it.

Osw. But after that?

Mar. The features of Idonea
Lurked in his face ——

Osw. Psha! Never to these eyes
Will retribution show itself again
With aspect so inviting. Why forbid me
To share your triumph?

Mar. Yes, her very look,
Smiling in sleep ——

Osw. A pretty feat of Fancy!

Mar. Though but a glimpse, it sent me to my prayers.

Osw. Is he alive?

Mar. What mean you? who alive?

Osw. Herbert! since you will have it, Baron Herbert;

He who will gain his Seignory when Idonea
Hath become Clifford's harlot — is *he* living?

Mar. The old Man in that dungeon *is* alive.

Osw. Henceforth, then, will I never in camp or field
Obey you more. Your weakness, to the Band

THE BORDERERS

Shall be proclaimed: brave Men, they all shall hear it.
You a protector of humanity!

Avenger you of outraged innocence!

Mar. 'T was dark — dark as the grave; yet did I
see,

Saw him — his face turned toward me; and I tell thee
Idonea's filial countenance was there

To baffle me — it put me to my prayers.

Upwards I cast my eyes, and, through a crevice,

Beheld a star twinkling above my head,

And, by the living God, I could not do it.

[*Sinks exhausted.*]

Osw. (*to himself*). Now may I perish if this turn do
more

Than make me change my course.

(*To Marmaduke.*)

Dear Marmaduke,

My words were rashly spoken; I recall them:

I feel my error; shedding human blood

Is a most serious thing.

Mar. Not I alone,

Thou too art deep in guilt.

Osw.

We have indeed

Been most presumptuous. There *is* guilt in this,

Else could so strong a mind have ever known

These trepidations? Plain it is that Heaven

Has marked out this foul Wretch as one whose crimes

THE BORDERERS

Must never come before a mortal judgment-seat,
Or be chastised by mortal instruments.

Mar. A thought that's worth a thousand worlds!

[Goes towards the dungeon.]

Osw. I grieve

That, in my zeal, I have caused you so much pain.

Mar. Think not of that! 't is over — we are safe.

Osw. (*as if to himself, yet speaking aloud*). The truth
is hideous, but how stifle it?

[Turning to Marmaduke.]

Give me your sword — nay, here are stones and fragments,

The least of which would beat out a man's brains;

Or you might drive your head against that wall.

No! this is not the place to hear the tale:

It should be told you pinioned in your bed,

Or on some vast and solitary plain,

Blown to you from a trumpet.

Mar. Why talk thus?

Whate'er the monster brooding in your breast

I care not: fear I have none, and cannot fear ——

[The sound of a horn is heard.]

That horn again — 'T is some one of our Troop;

What do they here? Listen!

Osw. What! dogged like thieves!

THE BORDERERS

Enter WALLACE and LACY, etc.

Lacy. You are found at last, thanks to the vagrant
Troop

For not misleading us.

Osw. (looking at Wallace). That subtle Grey-
beard —

I'd rather see my father's ghost.

Lacy (to Marmaduke). My Captain,
We come by order of the Band. Belike
You have not heard that Henry has at last
Dissolved the Barons' League, and sent abroad
His Sheriffs with fit force to reinstate
The genuine owners of such Lands and Baronies
As, in these long commotions, have been seized.
His Power is this way tending. It befits us
To stand upon our guard, and with our swords
Defend the innocent.

Mar. Lacy! we look
But at the surfaces of things; we hear
Of towns in flames, fields ravaged, young and old
Driven out in troops to want and nakedness;
Then grasp our swords and rush upon a cure
That flatters us, because it asks not thought:
The deeper malady is better hid;
The world is poisoned at the heart.

Lacy.

What mean you?

THE BORDERERS

Wal. (whose eye has been fixed suspiciously upon Oswald). Ay, what is it you mean?

Mar. Hark'e, my Friends; —
[*Appearing gay.*

Were there a Man who, being weak and helpless
And most forlorn, should bribe a Mother, pressed
By penury, to yield him up her Daughter,
A little Infant, and instruct the Babe,
Prattling upon his knee, to call him Father —

Lacy. Why, if his heart be tender, that offence
I could forgive him.

Mar. (*going on*). And should he make the Child
An instrument of falsehood, should he teach her
To stretch her arms, and dim the gladsome light
Of infant playfulness with piteous looks
Of misery that was not —

Lacy. Troth, 't is hard —
But in a world like ours —

Mar. (*changing his tone*). This selfsame Man —
Even while he printed kisses on the cheek
Of this poor Babe, and taught its innocent tongue
To lisp the name of Father — could he look
To the unnatural harvest of that time
When he should give her up, a Woman grown,
To him who bid the highest in the market
Of foul pollution —

THE BORDERERS

Lacy. The whole visible world
Contains not such a Monster!

Mar. For this purpose
Should he resolve to taint her Soul by means
Which bathe the limbs in sweat to think of them;
Should he, by tales which would draw tears from iron,
Work on her nature, and so turn compassion
And gratitude to ministers of vice,
And make the spotless spirit of filial love
Prime mover in a plot to damn his Victim
Both soul and body —

Wal. 'T is too horrible;
Oswald, what say you to it?

Lacy. Hew him down,
And fling him to the ravens.

Mar. But his aspect
It is so meek, his countenance so venerable.

Wal. (with an appearance of mistrust). But how, what say you, Oswald?

Lacy (at the same moment). Stab him, were it
Before the Altar.

Mar. What, if he were sick,
Tottering upon the very verge of life,
And old, and blind —

Lacy. Blind, say you?

Osw. (coming forward). Are we Men,

THE BORDERERS

Or own we baby Spirits? Genuine courage
Is not an accidental quality,
A thing dependent for its casual birth
On opposition and impediment.
Wisdom, if Justice speak the word, beats down
The giant's strength; and, at the voice of Justice,
Spare not the worm. The giant and the worm —
She weighs them in one scale. The wiles of woman,
And craft of age, seducing reason, first
Made weakness a protection, and obscured
The moral shapes of things. His tender cries
And helpless innocence — do they protect
The infant lamb? and shall the infirmities,
Which have enabled this enormous Culprit
To perpetrate his crimes, serve as a Sanctuary
To cover him from punishment? Shame! — Justice,
Admitting no resistance, bends alike
The feeble and the strong. She needs not here
Her bonds and chains, which make the mighty feeble.
— We recognise in this old Man a victim
Prepared already for the sacrifice.

Lacy. By Heaven, his words are reason!

Osw. Yes, my Friends,

His countenance is meek and venerable;
And, by the Mass, to see him at his prayers! —
I am of flesh and blood, and may I perish

THE BORDERERS

When my heart does not ache to think of it! —
Poor Victim! not a virtue under heaven
But what was made an engine to ensnare thee;
But yet I trust, Idonea, thou art safe.

Lacy. Idonea!

Wal. How! what? your Idonea? (*To Marmaduke.*)

Mar.

Mine!

But now no longer mine. You know Lord Clifford;
He is the Man to whom the Maiden — pure
As beautiful, and gentle and benign,
And in her ample heart loving even me —
Was to be yielded up.

Lacy. Now, by the head
Of my own child, this Man must die; my hand,
A worthier wanting, shall itself entwine
In his grey hairs! —

Mar. (*to Lacy*). I love the Father in thee.
You know me, Friends; I have a heart to feel,
And I have felt, more than perhaps becomes me
Or duty sanctions.

Lacy. We will have ample justice.
Who are we, Friends? Do we not live on ground
Where Souls are self-defended, free to grow
Like mountain oaks rocked by the stormy wind?
Mark the Almighty Wisdom, which decreed
This monstrous crime to be laid open — *here,*

THE BORDERERS

Where Reason has an eye that she can use,
And Men alone are Umpires. To the Camp
He shall be led, and there, the Country round
All gathered to the spot, in open day
Shall Nature be avenged.

Osw. 'T is nobly thought;
His death will be a monument for ages.

Mar. (to Lacy). I thank you for that hint. He shall
be brought

Before the Camp, and would that best and wisest
Of every country might be present. There,
His crime shall be proclaimed; and for the rest
It shall be done as Wisdom shall decide:
Meanwhile, do you two hasten back and see
That all is well prepared.

Wat. We will obey you.
(*Aside.*) But softly! we must look a little nearer.

Mar. Tell where you found us. At some future time
I will explain the cause.

[*Exeunt.*

THE BORDERERS

ACT III

SCENE — *The Door of the Hostel*

A group of Pilgrims as before; IDONEA and the Host among them

Host. Lady, you'll find your Father at the Convent
As I have told you: He left us yesterday
With two Companions; one of them, as seemed,
His most familiar Friend. (*Going.*) There was a letter
Of which I heard them speak, but that I fancy
Has been forgotten.

Idon. (*to Host.*) Farewell!

Host. Gentle pilgrims,
St. Cuthbert speed you on your holy errand.

[*Exeunt Idonea and Pilgrims.*]

SCENE — *A desolate Moor*

OSWALD (*alone*)

Osw. Carry him to the Camp! Yes, to the Camp.
Oh, Wisdom! a most wise resolve! and then,
That half a word should blow it to the winds!
This last device must end my work. — Methinks
It were a pleasant pastime to construct
A scale and table of belief — as thus —
Two columns, one for passion, one for proof;

THE BORDERERS

Each rises as the other falls: and first,
Passion a unit and *against* us — proof —
Nay, we must travel in another path,
Or we're stuck fast for ever; — passion, then,
Shall be a unit *for* us; proof — no, passion!
We'll not insult thy majesty by time,
Person, and place — the where, the when, the how,
And all particulars that dull brains require
To constitute the spiritless shape of Fact,
They bow to, calling the idol, Demonstration.
A whipping to the Moralists who preach
That misery is a sacred thing: for me,
I know no cheaper engine to degrade a man,
Nor any half so sure. This Stripling's mind
Is shaken till the dregs float on the surface;
And, in the storm and anguish of the heart,
He talks of a transition in his Soul,
And dreams that he is happy. We dissect
The senseless body, and why not the mind? —
These are strange sights — the mind of man, upturned
Is in all natures a strange spectacle;
In some a hideous one — hem! shall I stop?
No. — Thoughts and feelings will sink deep, but then
They have no substance. Pass but a few minutes,
And something shall be done which Memory
May touch, whene'er her Vassals are at work.

THE BORDERERS

Enter MARMADUKE, from behind

Osw. (*turning to meet him*). But listen, for my peace —

Mar. Why, I believe you.

Osw. But hear the proofs —

Mar. Ay, prove that when two peas
Lie snugly in a pod, the pod must then
Be larger than the peas — prove this — 't were mat-
ter

Worthy the hearing. Fool was I to dream
It ever could be otherwise!

Osw. Last night
When I returned with water from the brook,
I overheard the Villains — every word
Like red-hot iron burnt into my heart.
Said one, “It is agreed on. The blind Man
Shall feign a sudden illness, and the Girl,
Who on her journey must proceed alone,
Under pretence of violence, be seized.
She is,” continued the detested Slave,
“She is right willing — strange if she were not! —
They say, Lord Clifford is a savage man;
But, faith, to see him in his silken tunic,
Fitting his low voice to the minstrel’s harp,
There’s witchery in ’t. I never knew a maid
That could withstand it. True,” continued he,
“When we arranged the affair, she wept a little

THE BORDERERS

(Not the less welcome to my Lord for that)
And said, 'My Father he will have it so.'"

Mar. I am your hearer.

Osw. This I caught, and more

That may not be retold to any ear.

The obstinate bolt of a small iron door

Detained them near the gateway of the Castle.

By a dim lantern's light I saw that wreaths

Of flowers were in their hands, as if designed

For festive decoration; and they said,

With brutal laughter and most foul allusion,

That they should share the banquet with their Lord

And his new Favourite.

Mar. Misery! —

Osw. I knew

How you would be disturbed by this dire news,

And therefore chose this solitary Moor,

Here to impart the tale, of which, last night,

I strove to ease my mind, when our two Comrades,

Commissioned by the Band, burst in upon us.

Mar. Last night, when moved to lift the avenging steel,

I did believe all things were shadows — yea,

Living or dead all things were bodiless,

Or but the mutual mockeries of body,

Till that same star summoned me back again.

Now I could laugh till my ribs ached. Oh Fool!

THE BORDERERS

To let a creed, built in the heart of things,
Dissolve before a twinkling atom! — Oswald,
I could fetch lessons out of wiser schools
Than you have entered, were it worth the pains.
Young as I am, I might go forth a teacher,
And you should see how deeply I could reason
Of love in all its shapes, beginnings, ends;
Of moral qualities in their diverse aspects;
Of actions, and their laws and tendencies.

Osw. You take it as it merits —

Mar.

One a King,

General or Cham, Sultan or Emperor,
Strews twenty acres of good meadow-ground
With carcasses, in lineament and shape
And substance nothing differing from his own,
But that they cannot stand up of themselves;
Another sits i' th' sun, and by the hour
Floats kingcups in the brook — a Hero one
We call, and scorn the other as Time's spendthrift;
But have they not a world of common ground
To occupy — both fools, or wise alike,
Each in his way?

Osw.

Troth, I begin to think so.

Mar. Now for the corner-stone of my philosophy:
I would not give a denier for the man
Who, on such provocation as this earth

THE BORDERERS

Yields, could not chuck his babe beneath the chin,
And send it with a fillip to its grave.

Osw. Nay, you leave me behind.

Mar. That such a One,

So pious in demeanour! in his look
So saintly and so pure! —— Hark'e, my Friend,
I'll plant myself before Lord Clifford's Castle,
A surly mastiff kennels at the gate,
And he shall howl and I will laugh, a medley
Most tunable.

Osw. In faith, a pleasant scheme;
But take your sword along with you, for that
Might in such neighbourhood find seemly use. —
But first, how wash our hands of this old Man?

Mar. Oh yes, that mole, that viper in the path;
Plague on my memory, him I had forgotten.

Osw. You know we left him sitting — see him yonder.

Mar. Ha! ha! —

Osw. As 't will be but a moment's work,
I will stroll on; you follow when 't is done. [*Exeunt.*

*SCENE changes to another part of the Moor at
a short distance*

HERBERT is discovered seated on a stone

Her. A sound of laughter, too! — 't is well — I feared,
The Stranger had some pitiable sorrow

THE BORDERERS

Pressing upon his solitary heart.

Hush! — 't is the feeble and earth-loving wind
That creeps along the bells of the crisp heather.

Alas! 't is cold — I shiver in the sunshine —

What can this mean? There is a psalm that speaks
Of God's parental mercies — with Idonea

I used to sing it. — Listen! — what foot is there?

Enter MARMADUKE

Mar. (*aside — looking at Herbert*). And I have loved
this Man! and *she* hath loved him!

And I loved her, and she loves the Lord Clifford!

And there it ends; — if this be not enough

To make mankind merry for evermore,

Then plain it is as day, that eyes were made

For a wise purpose — verily to weep with!

[*Looking round.*]

A pretty prospect this, a masterpiece

Of Nature, finished with most curious skill!

(*To Herbert.*) Good Baron, have you ever practised
tillage?

Pray tell me what this land is worth by the acre?

Her. How glad I am to hear your voice! I know
not

Wherein I have offended you; — last night

I found in you the kindest of Protectors;

This morning, when I spoke of weariness,

THE BORDERERS

You from my shoulder took my scrip and threw it
About your own; but for these two hours past
Once only have you spoken, when the lark
Whirred from among the fern beneath our feet,
And I, no coward in my better days,
Was almost terrified.

Mar. That's excellent! —

So, you bethought you of the many ways
In which a man may come to his end, whose crimes
Have roused all Nature up against him — pshaw! —

Her. For mercy's sake, is nobody in sight?
No traveller, peasant, herdsman?

Mar. Not a soul:

Here is a tree, ragged, and bent, and bare,
That turns its goat's-beard flakes of pea-green moss
From the stern breathing of the rough sea-wind;
This have we, but no other company:
Commend me to the place. If a man should die
And leave his body here, it were all one
As he were twenty fathoms underground.

Her. Where is our common Friend?

Mar. A ghost, methinks —

The Spirit of a murdered man, for instance —
Might have fine room to ramble about here,
A grand domain to speak and gibber in.

Her. Lost Man! if thou have any close-pent guilt

THE BORDERERS

Pressing upon thy heart, and this the hour
Of visitation —

Mar. A bold word from *you!*

Her. Restore him, Heaven!

Mar. The desperate Wretch! — A Flower,
Fairest of all flowers, was she once, but now
They have snapped her from the stem — Poh! let her
lie

Besoiled with mire, and let the houseless snail
Feed on her leaves. You knew her well — ay, there,
Old Man! you were a very Lynx, you knew
The worm was in her ——

Her. Mercy! Sir, what mean you?

Mar. You have a Daughter!

Her. Oh that she were here! —
She hath an eye that sinks into all hearts,
And if I have in aught offended you,
Soon would her gentle voice make peace between us.

Mar. (aside). I do believe he weeps — I could weep too —

There is a vein of her voice that runs through his:
Even such a Man my fancy bodied forth
From the first moment that I loved the Maid;
And for his sake I loved her more: these tears —
I did not think that aught was left in me
Of what I have been — yes, I thank thee, Heaven!

THE BORDERERS

One happy thought has passed across my mind.
— It may not be — I am cut off from man;
No more shall I be man — no more shall I
Have human feelings! — (*To Herbert*) — Now, for a
little more
About your Daughter!

Her. Troops of armèd men,
Met in the roads, would bless us; little children,
Rushing along in the full tide of play,
Stood silent as we passed them! I have heard
The boisterous carman, in the miry road,
Check his loud whip and hail us with mild voice,
And speak with milder voice to his poor beasts.

Mar. And whither were you going?

Her. Learn, young Man,
To fear the virtuous, and reverence misery,
Whether too much for patience, or, like mine,
Softened till it becomes a gift of mercy.

Mar. Now, this is as it should be!

Her. I am weak! —
My Daughter does not know how weak I am;
And, as thou see'st, under the arch of heaven
Here do I stand, alone, to helplessness,
By the good God, our common Father, doomed! —
But I had once a spirit and an arm ——

Mar. Now, for a word about your Barony:

THE BORDERERS

I fancy when you left the Holy Land,
And came to — what's your title — eh? your claims
Were undisputed!

Her. Like a mendicant,
Whom no one comes to meet, I stood alone; —
I murmured — but, remembering Him who feeds
The pelican and ostrich of the desert,
From my own threshold I looked up to Heaven
And did not want glimmerings of quiet hope.
So, from the court I passed, and down the brook,
Led by its murmur, to the ancient oak
I came; and when I felt its cooling shade,
I sate me down, and cannot but believe —
While in my lap I held my little Babe
And clasped her to my heart, my heart that ached
More with delight than grief — I heard a voice
Such as by Cherith on Elijah called;
It said, “I will be with thee.” A little boy,
A shepherd-lad, ere yet my trance was gone,
Hailed us as if he had been sent from heaven,
And said, with tears, that he would be our guide:
I had a better guide — that innocent Babe —
Her, who hath saved me, to this hour, from harm,
From cold, from hunger, penury, and death;
To whom I owe the best of all the good
I have, or wish for, upon earth — and more

THE BORDERERS

And higher far than lies within earth's bounds:
Therefore I bless her: when I think of Man,
I bless her with sad spirit, — when of God,
I bless her in the fulness of my joy!

Mar. The name of daughter in his mouth, he
prays!

With nerves so steady, that the very flies
Sit unmolested on his staff. — Innocent! —
If he were innocent — then he would tremble
And be disturbed, as I am. (*Turning aside.*) I have
read

In Story, what men now alive have witnessed,
How, when the People's mind was racked with doubt,
Appeal was made to the great Judge: the Accused
With naked feet walked over burning ploughshares.
Here is a Man by Nature's hand prepared
For a like trial, but more merciful.
Why else have I been led to this bleak Waste?
Bare is it, without house or track, and destitute
Of obvious shelter, as a shipless sea.
Here will I leave him — here — All-seeing God!
Such as *he* is, and sore perplexed as I am,
I will commit him to this final *Ordeal*! —
He heard a voice — a shepherd-lad came to him
And was his guide; if once, why not again,
And in this desert? If never — then the whole

THE BORDERERS

Of what he says, and looks, and does, and is,
Makes up one damning falsehood. Leave him here
To cold and hunger! — Pain is of the heart,
And what are a few throes of bodily suffering
If they can waken one pang of remorse?

[*Goes up to Herbert.*

Old Man! my wrath is as a flame burnt out,
It cannot be rekindled. Thou art here
Led by my hand to save thee from perdition;
Thou wilt have time to breathe and think ——

Her.

Oh, Mercy!

Mar. I know the need that all men have of mercy,
And therefore leave thee to a righteous judgment.

Her. My Child, my blessèd Child!

Mar.

No more of that;

Thou wilt have many guides if thou art innocent;
Yea, from the utmost corners of the earth,
That Woman will come o'er this Waste to save thee.

[*He pauses and looks at Herbert's staff.*

Ha! what is here? and carved by her own hand!

[*Reads upon the staff.*

“I am eyes to the blind, saith the Lord.
He that puts his trust in me shall not fail!”
Yes, be it so; — repent and be forgiven —
God and that staff are now thy only guides.

[*He leaves Herbert on the Moor.*

THE BORDERERS

SCENE — *An eminence, a Beacon on the summit*

LACY, WALLACE, LENNOX, etc. etc.

Several of the Band (confusedly). But patience!

One of the Band. Curses on that Traitor, Oswald! —

Our Captain made a prey to foul device! —

Len. (to Wal.). His tool, the wandering Beggar, made last night

A plain confession, such as leaves no doubt,
Knowing what otherwise we know too well,
That she revealed the truth. Stand by me now;
For rather would I have a nest of vipers
Between my breast-plate and my skin, than make
Oswald my special enemy, if you
Deny me your support.

Lacy. We have been fooled —

But for the motive?

Wal. Natures such as his
Spin motives out of their own bowels, Lacy!
I learned this when I was a Confessor.
I know him well; there needs no other motive
Than that most strange incontinence in crime
Which haunts this Oswald. Power is life to him
And breath and being; where he cannot govern,
He will destroy.

THE BORDERERS

Lacy. To have been trapped like moles! —
Yes, you are right, we need not hunt for motives:
There is no crime from which this man would shrink;
He recks not human law; and I have noticed
That often when the name of God is uttered,
A sudden blankness overspreads his face.

Len. Yet, reasoner as he is, his pride has built
Some uncouth superstition of its own.

Wal. I have seen traces of it.

Len. Once he headed
A band of Pirates in the Norway seas;
And when the King of Denmark summoned him
To the oath of fealty, I well remember,
'T was a strange answer that he made; he said,
"I hold of Spirits, and the Sun in heaven."

Lacy. He is no madman.

Wal. A most subtle doctor
Were that man, who could draw the line that parts
Pride and her daughter, Cruelty, from Madness,
That should be scourged, not pitied. Restless Minds,
Such Minds as find amid their fellow-men
No heart that loves them, none that they can love,
Will turn perforce and seek for sympathy
In dim relation to imagined Beings.

One of the Band. What if he mean to offer up our
Captain

THE BORDERERS

An expiation and a sacrifice
To those infernal fiends!

Wal. Now, if the event
Should be as Lennox has foretold, then swear,
My Friends, his heart shall have as many wounds
As there are daggers here.

Lacy. What need of swearing!

One of the Band. Let us away!

Another. Away!

A third. Hark! how the horns
Of those Scotch Rovers echo through the vale.

Lacy. Stay you behind; and when the sun is down,
Light up this beacon.

One of the Band. You shall be obeyed.

[*They go out together.*]

SCENE — *The Wood on the edge of the Moor*

MARMADUKE (*alone*)

Mar. Deep, deep and vast, vast beyond human thought,
Yet calm. — I could believe, that there was here
The only quiet heart on earth. In terror,
Remembered terror, there is peace and rest.

Enter OSWALD

Osw. Ha! my dear Captain.

Mar. A later meeting, Oswald,
Would have been better timed.

THE BORDERERS

Osw. Alone, I see;
You have done your duty. I had hopes, which now
I feel that you will justify.

Mar. I had fears,
From which I have freed myself — but 't is my wish
To be alone, and therefore we must part.

Osw. Nay, then — I am mistaken. There's a weak-
ness
About you still; you talk of solitude —
I am your friend.

Mar. What need of this assurance
At any time? and why given now?

Osw. Because
You are now in truth my Master; you have taught me
What there is not another living man
Had strength to teach; — and therefore gratitude
Is bold, and would relieve itself by praise.

Mar. Wherefore press this on me?

Osw. Because I feel
That you have shown, and by a signal instance,
How they who would be just must seek the rule
By diving for it into their own bosoms.
To-day you have thrown off a tyranny
That lives but in the torpid acquiescence
Of our emasculated souls, the tyranny
Of the world's masters, with the musty rules

THE BORDERERS

By which they uphold their craft from age to age:
You have obeyed the only law that sense
Submits to recognise; the immediate law,
From the clear light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent Intellect.

Henceforth new prospects open on your path;
Your faculties should grow with the demand;
I still will be your friend, will cleave to you
Through good and evil, obloquy and scorn,
Oft as they dare to follow on your steps.

Mar. I would be left alone.

Osw. (exultingly). I know your motives!

I am not of the world's presumptuous judges,
Who damn where they can neither see nor feel,
With a hard-hearted ignorance; your struggles
I witnessed, and now hail your victory.

Mar. Spare me awhile that greeting.

Osw. It may be,

That some there are, squeamish half-thinking cow-
ards,

Who will turn pale upon you, call you murderer,
And you will walk in solitude among them.

A mighty evil for a strong-built mind! —

Join twenty tapers of unequal height

And light them joined, and you will see the less

How 't will burn down the taller; and they all

THE BORDERERS

Shall prey upon the tallest. Solitude! —
The Eagle lives in Solitude.

Mar.

Even so,

The Sparrow so on the housetop, and I,
The weakest of God's creatures, stand resolved
To abide the issue of my act, alone.

Osw. Now would you? and for ever? — My young
Friend,

As time advances either we become
The prey or masters of our own past deeds.
Fellowship we *must* have, willing or no;
And if good Angels fail, slack in their duty,
Substitutes, turn our faces where we may,
Are still forthcoming; some which, though they bear
Ill names, can render no ill services,
In recompense for what themselves required.
So meet extremes in this mysterious world,
And opposites thus melt into each other.

Mar. Time, since Man first drew breath, has never
moved

With such a weight upon his wings as now;
But they will soon be lightened.

Osw.

Ay, look up —

Cast round you your mind's eye, and you will learn
Fortitude is the child of Enterprise:
Great actions move our admiration, chiefly

THE BORDERERS

Because they carry in themselves an earnest
That we can suffer greatly.

Mar.

Very true.

Osw. Action is transitory — a step, a blow,
The motion of a muscle — this way or that —
'T is done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity.

Mar. Truth — and I feel it.

Osw.

What! if you had bid

Eternal farewell to unmingled joy
And the light dancing of the thoughtless heart;
It is the toy of fools, and little fit
For such a world as this. The wise abjure
All thoughts whose idle composition lives
In the entire forgetfulness of pain.
— I see I have disturbed you.

Mar.

By no means.

Osw. Compassion! — pity! — pride can do without
them;

And what if you should never know them more! —
He is a puny soul who, feeling pain,
Finds ease because another feels it too.
If e'er I open out this heart of mine
It shall be for a nobler end — to teach

THE BORDERERS

And not to purchase puling sympathy.

— Nay, you are pale.

Mar.

It may be so.

Osw.

Remorse —

It cannot live with thought; think on, think on,
And it will die. What! in this universe,
Where the least things control the greatest, where
The faintest breath that breathes can move a world;
What! feel remorse, where, if a cat had sneezed,
A leaf had fallen, the thing had never been
Whose very shadow gnaws us to the vitals.

Mar. Now, whither are you wandering? That a man
So used to suit his language to the time,
Should thus so widely differ from himself —
It is most strange.

Osw.

Murder! — what's in the word! —

I have no cases by me ready made
To fit all deeds. Carry him to the Camp! —
A shallow project; — you of late have seen
More deeply, taught us that the institutes
Of Nature, by a cunning usurpation
Banished from human intercourse, exist
Only in our relations to the brutes
That make the fields their dwelling. If a snake
Crawl from beneath our feet we do not ask
A license to destroy him: our good governors

THE BORDERERS

Hedge in the life of every pest and plague
That bears the shape of man; and for what purpose,
But to protect themselves from extirpation? —
This flimsy barrier you have overleaped.

Mar. My Office is fulfilled — the Man is now
Delivered to the Judge of all things.

Osw. Dead!

Mar. I have borne my burthen to its destined end.

Osw. This instant we'll return to our companions —
Oh how I long to see their faces again!

Enter IDONEA, with Pilgrims who continue their journey

Idon. (*after some time*). What, Marmaduke! now thou
art mine for ever.

And Oswald, too! (*To Marmaduke.*) On will we to my
Father

With the glad tidings which this day hath brought;
We'll go together, and, such proof received
Of his own rights restored, his gratitude
To God above will make him feel for ours.

Osw. I interrupt you?

Idon. Think not so.

Mar. Idonea,

That I should ever live to see this moment!

Idon. Forgive me. — Oswald knows it all — he knows,
Each word of that unhappy letter fell
As a blood drop from my heart.

THE BORDERERS

Osw.

'T was even so.

Mar. I have much to say, but for whose ear? — not thine.

Idon. Ill can I bear that look — Plead for me, Oswald!
You are my Father's Friend.

(*To Marmaduke.*)

Alas, you know not,

And never *can* you know, how much he loved me.

Twice had he been to me a father, twice

Had given me breath, and was I not to be

His daughter, once his daughter? could I withstand

His pleading face, and feel his clasping arms,

And hear his prayer that I would not forsake him

In his old age ——

[*Hides her face.*]

Mar. Patience — Heaven grant me patience! —
She weeps, she weeps — *my* brain shall burn for hours
Ere *I* can shed a tear.

Idon.

I was a woman;

And, balancing the hopes that are the dearest

To womankind with duty to my Father,

I yielded up those precious hopes, which nought

On earth could else have wrested from me; — if err-
ing,

Oh let me be forgiven!

Mar.

I *do* forgive thee.

Idon. But take me to your arms — this breast, alas!
It throbs, and you have a heart that does not feel it.

THE BORDERERS

Mar. (exultingly). She is innocent. [*He embraces her.*

Osw. (aside).

Were I a Moralist,

I should make wondrous revolution here;

It were a quaint experiment to show

The beauty of truth —

[*Addressing them.*

I see I interrupt you;

I shall have business with you, Marmaduke;

Follow me to the Hostel.

[*Exit Oswald.*

Idon.

Marmaduke,

This is a happy day. My Father soon

Shall sun himself before his native doors;

The lame, the hungry, will be welcome there.

No more shall he complain of wasted strength,

Of thoughts that fail, and a decaying heart;

His good works will be balm and life to him.

Mar. This is most strange! — I know not what it was,

But there was something which most plainly said,

That thou wert innocent.

Idon.

How innocent! —

Oh heavens! you've been deceived.

Mar.

Thou art a Woman,

To bring perdition on the universe.

Idon. Already I've been punished to the height

Of my offence.

[*Smiling affectionately.*

I see you love me still,

The labours of my hand are still your joy;

THE BORDERERS

Bethink you of the hour when on your shoulder
I hung this belt.

[*Pointing to the belt on which was suspended Herbert's scrip.*

Mar. Mercy of Heaven! [Sinks.

Idon. What ails you! [*Distractedly.*

Mar. The scrip that held his food, and I forgot
To give it back again!

Idon. What mean your words?

Mar. I know not what I said — all may be well.

Idon. That smile hath life in it!

Mar. This road is perilous;
I will attend you to a Hut that stands
Near the wood's edge — rest there to-night, I pray you:
For me, I have business, as you heard, with Oswald,
But will return to you by break of day.

[*Exeunt.*

THE BORDERERS

ACT IV

SCENE — *A desolate prospect — a ridge of rocks — a Chapel on the summit of one — Moon behind the rocks — night stormy — irregular sound of a Bell*

HERBERT *enters exhausted*

Her. That Chapel-bell in mercy seemed to guide me,
But now it mocks my steps; its fitful stroke
Can scarcely be the work of human hands.
Hear me, ye Men, upon the cliffs, if such
There be who pray nightly before the Altar.
Oh that I had but strength to reach the place!
My Child — my child — dark — dark — I faint —
this wind —

These stifling blasts — God help me!

Enter ELDRED

Eld. Better this bare rock,
Though it were tottering over a man's head,
Than a tight case of dungeon walls for shelter
From such rough dealing. [*A moaning voice is heard.*]

Ha! what sound is that?

Trees creaking in the wind (but none are here)
Send forth such noises — and that weary bell.
Surely some evil Spirit abroad to-night
Is ringing it — 't would stop a Saint in prayer,

THE BORDERERS

And that — what is it? never was sound so like
A human groan. Ha! what is here? Poor Man —
Murdered! alas! speak — speak, I am your friend:
No answer — hush — lost wretch, he lifts his hand
And lays it to his heart — (*Kneels to him*) I pray you
speak!

What has befallen you?

Her. (feebly). A stranger has done this,
And in the arms of a stranger I must die.

Eld. Nay, think not so: come, let me raise you up:
[Raises him.]

This is a dismal place — well — that is well —
I was too fearful — take me for your guide
And your support — my hut is not far off.
[Draws him gently off the stage.]

SCENE — *A room in the Hostel*

MARMADUKE and OSWALD

Mar. But for Idonea! — I have cause to think
That she is innocent.

Osw. Leave that thought awhile,
As one of those beliefs, which in their hearts
Lovers lock up as pearls, though oft no better
Than feathers clinging to their points of passion.
This day's event has laid on me the duty
Of opening out my story; you must hear it,

THE BORDERERS

And without further preface. — In my youth,
Except for that abatement which is paid
By envy as a tribute to desert,
I was the pleasure of all hearts, the darling
Of every tongue — as you are now. You've heard
That I embarked for Syria. On our voyage
Was hatched among the crew a foul Conspiracy
Against my honour, in the which our Captain
Was, I believed, prime Agent. The wind fell;
We lay becalmed week after week, until
The water of the vessel was exhausted;
I felt a double fever in my veins,
Yet rage suppressed itself; — to a deep stillness
Did my pride tame my pride; — for many days,
On a dead sea under a burning sky,
I brooded o'er my injuries, deserted
By Man and Nature; — if a breeze had blown,
It might have found its way into my heart,
And I had been — no matter — do you mark me?

Mar. Quick — to the point — if any untold crime
Doth haunt your memory.

Osw. Patience, hear me further! —
One day in silence did we drift at noon
By a bare rock, narrow, and white, and bare;
No food was there, no drink, no grass, no shade,
No tree, nor jutting eminence, nor form

THE BORDERERS

Inanimate large as the body of man,
Nor any living thing whose lot of life
Might stretch beyond the measure of one moon.
To dig for water on the spot, the Captain
Landed with a small troop, myself being one:
There I reproached him with his treachery.
Imperious at all times, his temper rose;
He struck me; and that instant had I killed him,
And put an end to his insolence, but my Comrades
Rushed in between us: then did I insist
(All hated him, and I was stung to madness)
That we should leave him there, alive! — we did so.

Mar. And he was famished?

Osw. Naked was the spot;
Methinks I see it now — how in the sun
Its stony surface glittered like a shield;
And in that miserable place we left him,
Alone but for a swarm of minute creatures,
Not one of which could help him while alive,
Or mourn him dead.

Mar. A man by men cast off,
Left without burial! nay, not dead nor dying,
But standing, walking, stretching forth his arms,
In all things like ourselves, but in the agony
With which he called for mercy; and — even so —
He was forsaken?

THE BORDERERS

Osw. There is a power in sounds:
The cries he uttered might have stopped the boat
That bore us through the water ——

Mar. You returned
Upon that dismal hearing — did you not?

Osw. Some scoffed at him with hellish mockery,
And laughed so loud it seemed that the smooth sea
Did from some distant region echo us.

Mar. We all are of one blood, our veins are filled
At the same poisonous fountain!

Osw. 'T was an island
Only by sufferance of the winds and waves,
Which with their foam could cover it at will.
I know not how he perished; but the calm,
The same dead calm, continued many days.

Mar. But his own crime had brought on him this
doom,
His wickedness prepared it; these expedients
Are terrible, yet ours is not the fault.

Osw. The man was famished, and was innocent!

Mar. Impossible!

Osw. The man had never wronged me.

Mar. Banish the thought, crush it, and be at peace.
His guilt was marked — these things could never be
Were there not eyes that see, and for good ends,
Where ours are baffled.

THE BORDERERS

Osw. I had been deceived.

Mar. And from that hour the miserable man
No more was heard of?

Osw. I had been betrayed.

Mar. And he found no deliverance!

Osw. The Crew
Gave me a hearty welcome; they had laid
The plot to rid themselves, at any cost,
Of a tyrannic Master whom they loathed.
So we pursued our voyage: when we landed,
The tale was spread abroad; my power at once
Shrunk from me; plans and schemes, and lofty hopes —
All vanished. I gave way — do you attend?

Mar. The Crew deceived you?

Osw. Nay, command yourself.

Mar. It is a dismal night — how the wind howls!

Osw. I hid my head within a Convent, there
Lay passive as a dormouse in mid-winter.
That was no life for me — I was o'erthrown,
But not destroyed.

Mar. The proofs — you ought to have seen
The guilt — have touched it — felt it at your heart —
As I have done.

Osw. A fresh tide of Crusaders
Drove by the place of my retreat: three nights
Did constant meditation dry my blood;

THE BORDERERS

Three sleepless nights I passed in sounding on,
Through words and things, a dim and perilous way;
And, wheresoe'er I turned me, I beheld
A slavery compared to which the dungeon
And clanking chains are perfect liberty.
You understand me — I was comforted;
I saw that every possible shape of action
Might lead to good — I saw it and burst forth
Thirsting for some of those exploits that fill
The earth for sure redemption of lost peace.

[*Marking Marmaduke's countenance.*

Nay, you have had the worst. Ferocity
Subsided in a moment, like a wind
That drops down dead out of a sky it vexed.
And yet I had within me evermore
A salient spring of energy; I mounted
From action up to action with a mind
That never rested — without meat or drink
Have I lived many days — my sleep was bound
To purposes of reason — not a dream
But had a continuity and substance
That waking life had never power to give.

Mar. O wretched Human-kind! — Until the mystery
Of all this world is solved, well may we envy
The worm, that, underneath a stone whose weight
Would crush the lion's paw with mortal anguish,

THE BORDERERS

Doth lodge, and feed, and coil, and sleep, in safety.
Fell not the wrath of Heaven upon those traitors?

Osw. Give not to them a thought. From Palestine
We marched to Syria: oft I left the Camp,
When all that multitude of hearts was still,
And followed on, through woods of gloomy cedar,
Into deep chasms troubled by roaring streams;
Or from the top of Lebanon surveyed
The moonlight desert, and the moonlight sea:
In these my lonely wanderings I perceived
What mighty objects do impress their forms
To elevate our intellectual being;
And felt, if aught on earth deserves a curse,
'T is that worst principle of ill which dooms
A thing so great to perish self-consumed.
— So much for my remorse!

Mar. Unhappy Man!

Osw. When from these forms I turned to contemplate
The World's opinions and her usages,
I seemed a Being who had passed alone
Into a region of futurity,
Whose natural element was freedom ——

Mar. Stop —

I may not, cannot, follow thee.

Osw. You must.

I had been nourished by the sickly food

THE BORDERERS

Of popular applause. I now perceived
That we are praised, only as men in us
Do recognise some image of themselves,
An abject counterpart of what they are,
Or the empty thing that they would wish to be.
I felt that merit has no surer test
Than obloquy; that, if we wish to serve
The world in substance, not deceive by show,
We must become obnoxious to its hate,
Or fear disguised in simulated scorn.

Mar. I pity, can forgive, you; but those wretches —
That monstrous perfidy!

Osw. Keep down your wrath.
False Shame discarded, spurious Fame despised,
Twin sisters both of Ignorance, I found
Life stretched before me smooth as some broad way
Cleared for a monarch's progress. Priests might spin
Their veil, but not for me — 't was in fit place
Among its kindred cobwebs. I had been,
And in that dream had left my native land,
One of Love's simple bondsmen — the soft chain
Was off for ever; and the men, from whom
This liberation came, you would destroy:
Join me in thanks for their blind services.

Mar. 'Tis a strange aching that, when we would curse
And cannot. — You have betrayed me — I have done —

THE BORDERERS

I am content — I know that he is guiltless —
That both are guiltless, without spot or stain,
Mutually consecrated. Poor old Man!
And I had heart for this, because thou lovedst
Her who from very infancy had been
Light to thy path, warmth to thy blood! — Together
[Turning to Oswald.]

We propped his steps, he leaned upon us both.

Osw. Ay, we are coupled by a chain of adamant;
Let us be fellow-labourers, then, to enlarge
Man's intellectual empire. We subsist
In slavery; all is slavery; we receive
Laws, but we ask not whence those laws have come;
We need an inward sting to goad us on.

Mar. Have you betrayed me? Speak to that.

Osw. The mask,

Which for a season I have stooped to wear,
Must be cast off. — Know then that I was urged,
(For other impulse let it pass) was driven,
To seek for sympathy, because I saw
In you a mirror of my youthful self;
I would have made us equal once again,
But that was a vain hope. You have struck home,
With a few drops of blood cut short the business;
Therein for ever you must yield to me.
But what is done will save you from the blank

THE BORDERERS

Of living without knowledge that you live:
Now you are suffering — for the future day,
'T is his who will command it. — Think of my story —
Herbert is *innocent*.

Mar. (*in a faint voice, and doubtfully*). You do but
echo

My own wild words?

Osw. Young Man, the seed must lie
Hid in the earth, or there can be no harvest;
'T is Nature's law. What I have done in darkness
I will avow before the face of day.
Herbert is *innocent*.

Mar. What fiend could prompt
This action? Innocent! — oh, breaking heart! —
Alive or dead, I'll find him. *[Exit.*

Osw. Alive — perdition! *[Exit.*

SCENE — *The inside of a poor Cottage*

ELEANOR and IDONEA seated

Idon. The storm beats hard — Mercy for poor or
rich,

Whose heads are shelterless in such a night!

A Voice without. Holla! to bed, good Folks, within!

Elea. O save us!

Idon. What can this mean?

THE BORDERERS

Elea.

Alas, for my poor husband! —

We'll have a counting of our flocks to-morrow;

The wolf keeps festival these stormy nights:

Be calm, sweet Lady, they are wassailers

[The voices die away in the distance.]

Returning from their Feast — my heart beats so —

A noise at midnight does so frighten me.

Idon. Hush!

[Listening.]

Elea. They are gone. On such a night my husband,

Dragged from his bed, was cast into a dungeon,

Where, hid from me, he counted many years,

A criminal in no one's eyes but theirs —

Not even in theirs — whose brutal violence

So dealt with him.

Idon.

I have a noble Friend

First among youths of knightly breeding, One

Who lives but to protect the weak or injured.

There again!

[Listening.]

Elea.

'T is my husband's foot. Good Eldred

Has a kind heart; but his imprisonment

Has made him fearful, and he'll never be

The man he was.

Idon.

I will retire; — good night!

[She goes within.]

THE BORDERERS

Enter ELDRED (hides a bundle)

Eld. Not yet in bed, Eleanor! — there are stains in that frock which must be washed out.

Elea. What has befallen you?

Eld. I am belated, and you must know the cause — (*speaking low*), that is the blood of an unhappy Man.

Elea. Oh! we are undone for ever.

Eld. Heaven forbid that I should lift my hand against any man. Eleanor, I have shed tears to-night, and it comforts me to think of it.

Elea. Where, where is he?

Eld. I have done him no harm, but —— it will be forgiven me; it would not have been so once.

Elea. You have not *buried* anything? You are no richer than when you left me?

Eld. Be at peace; I am innocent.

Elea. Then God be thanked —

[*A short pause; she falls upon his neck.*]

Eld. To-night I met with an old Man lying stretched upon the ground — a sad spectacle: I raised him up with a hope that we might shelter and restore him.

Elea. (*as if ready to run*). Where is he? You were not able to bring him *all* the way with you; let us return, I can help you. [Eldred *shakes his head.*]

Eld. He did not seem to wish for life: as I was struggling on, by the light of the moon I saw the stains of

THE BORDERERS

blood upon my clothes — he waved his hand, as if it were all useless; and I let him sink again to the ground.

Elea. Oh that I had been by your side!

Eld. I tell you his hands and his body were cold — how could I disturb his last moments? he strove to turn from me as if he wished to settle into sleep.

Elea. But, for the stains of blood —

Eld. He must have fallen, I fancy, for his head was cut; but I think his malady was cold and hunger.

Elea. Oh, Eldred, I shall never be able to look up at this roof in storm or fair but I shall tremble.

Eld. Is it not enough that my ill stars have kept me abroad to-night till this hour? I come home, and this is my comfort!

Elea. But did he say nothing which might have set you at ease?

Eld. I thought he grasped my hand while he was muttering something about his Child — his Daughter — (*starting as if he heard a noise*). What is that?

Elea. Eldred, you are a father.

Eld. God knows what was in my heart, and will not curse my son for my sake.

Elea. But you prayed by him? you waited the hour of his release?

Eld. The night was wasting fast; I have no friend; I am spited by the world — his wound terrified me —

THE BORDERERS

if I had brought him along with me, and he had died in my arms! —— I am sure I heard something breathing — and this chair!

Elea. Oh, Eldred, you will die alone. You will have nobody to close your eyes — no hand to grasp your dying hand — I shall be in my grave. A curse will attend us all.

Eld. Have you forgot your own troubles when I was in the dungeon?

Elea. And you left him alive?

Eld. Alive! — the damps of death were upon him — he could not have survived an hour.

Elea. In the cold, cold night.

Eld. (*in a savage tone*). Ay, and his head was bare; I suppose you would have had me lend my bonnet to cover it. — You will never rest till I am brought to a felon's end.

Elea. Is there nothing to be done? cannot we go to the Convent?

Eld. Ay, and say at once that I murdered him!

Elea. Eldred, I know that ours is the only house upon the Waste; let us take heart; this Man may be rich; and could he be saved by our means, his gratitude may reward us.

Eld. 'T is all in vain.

Elea. But let us make the attempt. This old Man

THE BORDERERS

may have a wife, and he may have children — let us return to the spot; we may restore him, and his eyes may yet open upon those that love him.

Eld. He will never open them more; even when he spoke to me, he kept them firmly sealed as if he had been blind.

Idon. (*rusthing out*). It is, it is, my Father —

Eld. We are betrayed. [Looking at Idonea.

Elea. His Daughter! — God have mercy!

[Turning to Idonea.

Idon. (*sinking down*). Oh! lift me up and carry me to the place.

You are safe; the whole world shall not harm you.

Elea. This Lady is his Daughter.

Eld. (*moved*). I'll lead you to the spot.

Idon. (*springing up*). Alive! — you heard him breathe? quick, quick —

[*Exeunt.*

THE BORDERERS

ACT V

SCENE — *A wood on the edge of the Waste*

Enter OSWALD and a Forester

For. He leaned upon the bridge that spans the glen,
And down into the bottom cast his eye,
That fastened there, as it would check the current.

Osw. He listened too; did you not say he listened?

For. As if there came such moaning from the flood
As is heard often after stormy nights.

Osw. But did he utter nothing?

For. See him there!

MARMADUKE appearing

Mar. Buzz, buzz, ye black and winged freebooters;
That is no substance which ye settle on!

For. His senses play him false; and see, his arms
Outspread, as if to save himself from falling! —
Some terrible phantom I believe is now
Passing before him, such as God will not
Permit to visit any but a man
Who has been guilty of some horrid crime.

[*Marmaduke disappears.*]

Osw. The game is up! —

For. If it be needful, Sir,
I will assist you to lay hands upon him.

THE BORDERERS

Osw. No, no, my Friend, you may pursue your business —

'T is a poor wretch of an unsettled mind,
Who has a trick of straying from his keepers;
We must be gentle. Leave him to my care.

[*Exit Forester.*]

If his own eyes play false with him, these freaks
Of fancy shall be quickly tamed by mine;
The goal is reached. My Master shall become
A shadow of myself — made by myself.

SCENE — *The edge of the Moor*

MARMADUKE and ELDRED enter from opposite sides

Mar. (*raising his eyes and perceiving Eldred*). In any
corner of this savage Waste,

Have you, good Peasant, seen a blind old Man?

Eld. I heard —

Mar. You heard him, where? when heard him?

Eld. As you know,

The first hours of last night were rough with storm:

I had been out in search of a stray heifer;

Returning late, I heard a moaning sound;

Then, thinking that my fancy had deceived me,

I hurried on, when straight a second moan,

A human voice distinct, struck on my ear,

So guided, distant a few steps, I found

THE BORDERERS

An aged Man, and such as you describe.

Mar. You heard! — he called you to him? Of all men
The best and kindest! — but where is he? guide me,
That I may see him.

Eld.

On a ridge of rocks

A lonesome Chapel stands, deserted now:
The bell is left, which no one dares remove;
And, when the stormy wind blows o'er the peak,
It rings, as if a human hand were there
To pull the cord. I guess he must have heard it;
And it had led him towards the precipice,
To climb up to the spot whence the sound came;
But he had failed through weakness. From his hand
His staff had dropped, and close upon the brink
Of a small pool of water he was laid,
As if he had stooped to drink, and so remained
Without the strength to rise.

Mar.

Well, well, he lives,

And all is safe: what said he?

Eld.

But few words:

He only spake to me of a dear Daughter,
Who, so he feared, would never see him more;
And of a Stranger to him, One by whom
He had been sore misused; but he forgave
The wrong and the wrong-doer. You are troubled —
Perhaps you are his son?

THE BORDERERS

Mar.

The All-seeing knows,

I did not think he had a living Child.—

But whither did you carry him?

Eld.

He was torn.

His head was bruised, and there was blood about him —

Mar. That was no work of mine.

Eld.

Nor was it mine.

Mar. But had he strength to walk? I could have borne him

A thousand miles.

Eld.

I am in poverty,

And know how busy are the tongues of men;

My heart was willing, Sir, but I am one

Whose good deeds will not stand by their own light;

And, though it smote me more than words can tell,

I left him.

Mar.

I believe that there are phantoms,

That in the shape of man do cross our path

On evil instigation, to make sport

Of our distress — and thou art one of them!

But things substantial have so pressed on me ——

Eld. My wife and children came into my mind.

Mar. Oh Monster! Monster! there are three of us,
And we shall howl together.

[After a pause and in a feeble voice.

THE BORDERERS

I am deserted

At my worst need, my crimes have in a net

(*Pointing to Eldred*) Entangled this poor man. —

Where was it? where? [*Dragging him along.*]

Eld. 'T is needless; spare your violence. His Daughter —

Mar. Ay, in the word a thousand scorpions lodge
This old man *had* a Daughter.

Eld. To the spot

I hurried back with her. — O save me, Sir,

From such a journey! — there was a black tree,

A single tree; she thought it was her Father. —

Oh Sir, I would not see that hour again

For twenty lives. The daylight dawned, and now —

Nay; hear my tale, 't is fit that you should hear it —

As we approached, a solitary crow

Rose from the spot; — the Daughter clapped her
hands,

And then I heard a shriek so terrible

[*Marmaduke shrinks back.*]

The startled bird quivered upon the wing.

Mar. Dead, dead! —

Eld. (*after a pause*). A dismal matter, Sir, for me,
And seems the like for you; if 't is your wish,
I'll lead you to his Daughter; but 't were best
That she should be prepared; I'll go before.

THE BORDERERS

Mar. There will be need of preparation.

[*Eldred goes off.*]

Elea. (*enters*).

Master!

Your limbs sink under you, shall I support you?

Mar. (*taking her arm*). Woman, I've lent my body
to the service

Which now thou tak'st upon thee. God forbid

That thou shouldst ever meet a like occasion

With such a purpose in thine heart as mine was.

Elea. Oh, why have I to do with things like these?

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE *changes to the door of* ELDRED'S cottage

IDONEA seated — enter ELDRED

Eld. Your Father, Lady, from a wilful hand
Has met unkindness; so indeed he told me,
And you remember such was my report:
From what has just befallen me I have cause
To fear the very worst.

Idon. My Father is dead;

Why dost thou come to me with words like these?

Eld. A wicked Man should answer for his crimes.

Idon. Thou seest me what I am.

Eld.

It was most heinous,

And doth call out for vengeance.

THE BORDERERS

Idon.

Do not add,

I prithee, to the harm thou'st done already.

Eld. Hereafter you will thank me for this service.

Hard by, a Man I met, who, from plain proofs

Of interfering Heaven, I have no doubt,

Laid hands upon your Father. Fit it were

You should prepare to meet him.

Idon.

I have nothing

To do with others; help me to my Father —

*[She turns and sees Marmaduke leaning on
Eleanor — throws herself upon his neck, and
after some time,*

In joy I met thee, but a few hours past;

And thus we meet again; one human stay

Is left me still in thee. Nay, shake not so.

Mar. In such a wilderness — to see no thing,

No, not the pitying moon!

Idon.

And perish so.

Mar. Without a dog to moan for him.

Idon.

Think not of it,

But enter there and see him how he sleeps,

Tranquil as he had died in his own bed.

Mar. Tranquil — why not?

Idon.

Oh, peace!

Mar.

He is at peace;

His body is at rest: there was a plot,

THE BORDERERS

A hideous plot, against the soul of man:
It took effect — and yet I baffled it,
In *some* degree.

Idon. Between us stood, I thought,
A cup of consolation, filled from Heaven
For both our needs; must I, and in thy presence,
Alone partake of it? — Belovèd Marmaduke!

Mar. Give me a reason why the wisest thing
That the earth owns shall never choose to die,
But some one must be near to count his groans.
The wounded deer retires to solitude,
And dies in solitude: all things but man,
All die in solitude. [*Moving towards the cottage door.*

Mysterious God,
If she had never lived I had not done it! —

Idon. Alas, the thought of such a cruel death
Has overwhelmed him. — I must follow.

Eld. Lady!
You will do well; (*she goes*) unjust suspicion may
Cleave to this Stranger: if, upon his entering,
The dead Man heave a groan, or from his side
Uplift his hand — that would be evidence.

Elea. Shame! Eldred, shame!

Mar. (*both returning*). The dead have but one
face (*to himself*).

And such a Man — so meek and unoffending —

THE BORDERERS

Helpless and harmless as a babe: a Man,
By obvious signal to the world's protection,
Solemnly dedicated — to decoy him! —

Idon. Oh, had you seen him living! —

Mar. I (so filled

With horror is this world) am unto thee
The thing most precious, that it now contains:
Therefore through me alone must be revealed
By whom thy Parent was destroyed, Idonea!
I have the proofs! —

Idon. O miserable Father!

Thou didst command me to bless all mankind;
Nor to this moment, have I ever wished
Evil to any living thing; but hear me,
Hear me, ye Heavens! — (*kneeling*) — may vengeance
haunt the fiend

For this most cruel murder: let him live
And move in terror of the elements;
The thunder send him on his knees to prayer
In the open streets, and let him think he sees,
If e'er he entereth the house of God,
The roof, self-moved, unsettling o'er his head;
And let him, when he would lie down at night,
Point to his wife the blood-drops on his pillow!

Mar. My voice was silent, but my heart hath joined
thee.

THE BORDERERS

Idon. (*leaning on Marmaduke*). Left to the mercy of
that savage Man!

How could he call upon his Child! — O Friend!

[*Turns to Marmaduke.*

My faithful true and only Comforter.

Mar. Ay, come to me and weep. (*He kisses her.*)

(*To Eldred.*) Yes, Varlet, look,

The devils at such sights do clap their hands.

[*Eldred retires alarmed.*

Idon. Thy vest is torn, thy cheek is deadly pale;
Hast thou pursued the monster?

Mar. I have found him. —

Oh! would that thou hadst perished in the flames!

Idon. Here art thou, then can I be desolate? —

Mar. There was a time, when this protecting hand
Availed against the mighty; never more
Shall blessings wait upon a deed of mine.

Idon. Wild words for me to hear, for me, an orphan
Committed to thy guardianship by Heaven;
And, if thou hast forgiven me, let me hope,
In this deep sorrow, trust, that I am thine
For closer care; — here, is no malady. [*Taking his arm.*

Mar. There, *is* a malady —

(*Striking his heart and forehead*). And here, and here
A mortal malady. — I am accurst:

All Nature curses me, and in my heart

THE BORDERERS

Thy curse is fixed; the truth must be laid bare.
It must be told, and borne. I am the man,
(Abused, betrayed, but how it matters not)
Presumptuous above all that ever breathed,
Who, casting as I thought a guilty Person
Upon Heaven's righteous judgment, did become
An instrument of Fiends. Through me, through me
Thy Father perished.

Idon. Perished — by what mischance?

Mar. Belovèd! — if I dared, so would I call thee —
Conflict must cease, and, in thy frozen heart,
The extremes of suffering meet in absolute peace.

[*He gives her a letter.*

Idon. (*reads*). “Be not surprised if you hear that
some signal judgment has befallen the man who calls
himself your father; he is now with me, as his signature
will shew: abstain from conjecture till you see me.

“HERBERT.

“MARMADUKE.”

The writing Oswald's; the signature my Father's:
(*Looks steadily at the paper*). And here is yours, — or
do my eyes deceive me?

You have then seen my Father?

Mar. He has leaned
Upon this arm.

Idon. You led him towards the Convent?

THE BORDERERS

Mar. That Convent was Stone-Arthur Castle.
Thither

We were his guides. I on that night resolved
That he should wait thy coming till the day
Of resurrection.

Idon. Miserable Woman,
Too quickly moved, too easily giving way,
I put denial on thy suit, and hence,
With the disastrous issue of last night,
Thy perturbation, and these frantic words.
Be calm, I pray thee!

Mar. Oswald ——

Idon. Name him not.

Enter female Beggar

Beg. And he is dead! — that Moor — how shall I
cross it?

By night, by day, never shall I be able
To travel half a mile alone. — Good Lady!
Forgive me! — Saints forgive me. Had I thought
It would have come to this! —

Idon. What brings you hither? Speak!

Beg. (*pointing to Marmaduke*). This innocent Gentleman. Sweet heavens! I told him
Such tales of your dead Father! — God is my judge,
I thought there was no harm: but that bad Man,
He bribed me with his gold, and looked so fierce.

THE BORDERERS

Mercy! I said I know not what — oh pity me —
I said, sweet Lady, you were not his Daughter —
Pity me, I am haunted; — thrice this day
My conscience made me wish to be struck blind;
And then I would have prayed, and had no voice.

Idon. (to Marmaduke). Was it my Father? — no,
no, no, for he

Was meek and patient, feeble, old and blind,
Helpless, and loved me dearer than his life.
— But hear me. For *one* question, I have a heart
That will sustain me. Did you murder him?

Mar. No, not by stroke of arm. But learn the process:
Proof after proof was pressed upon me; guilt
Made evident, as seemed, by blacker guilt,
Whose impious folds enwrapped even thee; and truth
And innocence, embodied in his looks,
His words and tones and gestures, did but serve
With me to aggravate his crimes, and heaped
Ruin upon the cause for which they pleaded.
Then pity crossed the path of my resolve:
Confounded, I looked up to Heaven, and cast,
Idonea! thy blind Father, on the Ordeal
Of the bleak Waste — left him — and so he died! —

[*Idonea sinks senseless; Beggar, Eleanor, etc.,
crowd round, and bear her off.*

Why may we speak these things, and do no more;

THE BORDERERS

Why should a thrust of the arm have such a power,
And words that tell these things be heard in vain?
She is not dead. Why! — if I loved this Woman,
I would take care she never woke again;
But she *WILL* wake, and she will weep for me,
And say, no blame was mine — and so, poor fool,
Will waste her curses on another name.

[*He walks about distractedly.*]

Enter OSWALD

Osw. (*to himself*). Strong to o'erturn, strong also to
build up. [To Marmaduke.]

The starts and sallies of our last encounter
Were natural enough; but that, I trust,
Is all gone by. You have cast off the chains
That fettered your nobility of mind —
Delivered heart and head!

Let us to Palestine;

This is a paltry field for enterprise.

Mar. Ay, what shall we encounter next? This issue —
'T was nothing more than darkness deepening darkness,

And weakness crowned with the impotence of death! —
Your pupil is, you see, an apt proficient. (*Ironically.*)
Start not! — Here is another face hard by;
Come, let us take a peep at both together,
And, with a voice at which the dead will quake,

THE BORDERERS

Resound the praise of your morality —
Of this too much.

*[Drawing Oswald towards the Cottage — stops
short at the door.]*

Men are there, millions, Oswald,
Who with bare hands would have plucked out thy
heart

And flung it to the dogs: but I am raised
Above, or sunk below, all further sense
Of provocation. Leave me, with the weight
Of that old Man's forgiveness on thy heart,
Pressing as heavily as it doth on mine.
Coward I have been; know, there lies not now
Within the compass of a mortal thought,
A deed that I would shrink from; — but to endure,
That is my destiny. May it be thine:
Thy office, thy ambition, be henceforth
To feed remorse, to welcome every sting
Of penitential anguish, yea with tears.
When seas and continents shall lie between us —
The wider space the better — we may find
In such a course fit links of sympathy,
An incommunicable rivalry
Maintained, for peaceful ends beyond our view.

*[Confused voices — several of the Band enter —
rush upon Oswald, and seize him.]*

THE BORDERERS

One of them. I would have dogged him to the jaws
of hell —

Osw. Ha! is it so! — That vagrant Hag! — this comes
Of having left a thing like her alive! *[Aside.*

Several voices. Despatch him!

Osw. If I pass beneath a rock
And shout, and, with the echo of my voice,
Bring down a heap of rubbish, and it crush me,
I die without dishonour. Famished, starved,
A Fool and Coward blended to my wish!

[Smiles scornfully and exultingly at Marmaduke.

Wal. 'T is done! *[Stabs him.*

Another of the Band. The ruthless Traitor!

Mar. A rash deed! —

With that reproof I do resign a station
Of which I have been proud.

Wil. (*approaching Marmaduke*). O my poor Master!

Mar. Discerning Monitor, my faithful Wilfred,
Why art thou here? *[Turning to Wallace.*

Wallace, upon these Borders,
Many there be whose eyes will not want cause
To weep that I am gone. Brothers in arms!
Raise on that dreary Waste a monument
That may record my story: nor let words —
Few must they be, and delicate in their touch

THE BORDERERS

As light itself — be these withheld from Her
Who, through most wicked arts, was made an orphan
By One who would have died a thousand times,
To shield her from a moment's harm. To you,
Wallace and Wilfred, I commend the Lady,
By lowly nature reared, as if to make her
In all things worthier of that noble birth,
Whose long-suspended rights are now on the eve
Of restoration: with your tenderest care
Watch over her, I pray — sustain her ——

Several of the Band (eagerly). Captain!

Mar. No more of that; in silence hear my doom:
A hermitage has furnished fit relief
To some offenders: other penitents,
Less patient in their wretchedness, have fallen,
Like the old Roman, on their own sword's point.
They had their choice: a wanderer *must I* go,
The Spectre of that innocent Man, my guide.
No human ear shall ever hear me speak;
No human dwelling ever give me food,
Or sleep, or rest: but, over waste and wild,
In search of nothing, that this earth can give,
But expiation, will I wander on —
A Man by pain and thought compelled to live,
Yet loathing life — till anger is appeased
In Heaven, and Mercy gives me leave to die.

THE REVERIE OF POOR SUSAN

1797 1800

This arose out of my observation of the affecting music of these birds hanging in this way in the London streets during the freshness and stillness of the Spring morning.

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three
years:

Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.

'T is a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale,
Down which she so often has tripped with her pail;
And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
The one only dwelling on earth that she loves.

She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade:
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes!

THE BIRTH OF LOVE

1797 1842

Translated from some French stanzas by Francis Wrangham, and printed in "Poems by Francis Wrangham, M.A."

WHEN Love was born of heavenly line,
What dire intrigues disturbed Cythera's joy!
Till Venus cried, "A mother's heart is mine;
None but myself shall nurse my boy!"

But, infant as he was, the child
In that divine embrace enchanted lay;
And, by the beauty of the vase beguiled,
Forgot the beverage — and pined away.

"And must my offspring languish in my sight?"
(Alive to all a mother's pain,
The Queen of Beauty thus her court addressed)
"No: Let the most discreet of all my train
Receive him to her breast:
Think all, he is the God of young delight."

Then TENDERNESS with CANDOUR joined,
And GAIETY the charming office sought;
Nor even DELICACY stayed behind:
But none of those fair Graces brought

THE BIRTH OF LOVE

Wherewith to nurse the child — and still he pined.
Some fond hearts to COMPLIANCE seemed inclined;

But she had surely spoiled the boy:

And sad experience forbade a thought
On the wild Goddess of VOLUPTUOUS JOY.

Long undecided lay th' important choice,
Till of the beauteous court, at length, a voice
Pronounced the name of HOPE: — The conscious child
Stretched forth his little arms, and smiled.

'T is said ENJOYMENT (who averred
The charge belonged to her alone)
Jealous that HOPE had been preferred
Laid snares to make the babe her own.

Of INNOCENCE the garb she took,
The blushing mien and downcast look;
And came her services to proffer:
And HOPE (what has not Hope believed!)
By that seducing air deceived,
Accepted of the offer.

It happened that, to sleep inclined,
Deluded HOPE for one short hour
To that false INNOCENCE's power
Her little charge consigned.

THE BIRTH OF LOVE

The Goddess then her lap with sweetmeats filled

And gave, in handfuls gave, the treacherous store:

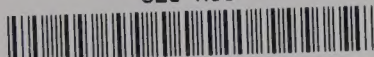
A wild delirium first the infant thrilled;

But soon upon her breast he sunk—to wake no more.

END OF VOLUME I

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